

**"MY DEAR DAUGHTERS"**

CONFERENCES AND INSTRUCTIONS  
OF  
SAINT MARY EUPHRASIA PELLETIER

Translated from:  
Entretiens et Instructions  
de la  
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## **A MESSAGE FROM OUR SUPERIOR GENERAL**

Rome, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1992

My dear Sisters,

These words of St. Mary Euphrasia, heard so many times, will perhaps now take on new significance. Besides being a faithful translation, they are written in a style more adapted to today's reader.

Surely, then, these Conferences will provide one answer to the desire, evident throughout the Congregation, for a return to our sources and a deepening of our Good Shepherd spirituality. That is why I confidently invite you to reflect on the still very relevant words of our saintly Foundress, to live them fully and so respond to the Church's expectations.

This work, undertaken by dear Sister Mary Aquinas Lee, is a kind of continuation of her generous service to the Congregation during the difficult postConciliar years. A fresh and whole-hearted commitment by our Sisters to the reading of these Conferences would surely be our best thanks!

May St. Mary Euphrasia continue to speak to us and help us to proclaim, again and again, the tender and merciful message of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Liliane Tauvette  
Superior General

## TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

To gratitude for the privilege of translating this important part of our Congregation's heritage, must be added a concern to, as it were, bridge the gap between today's reader and Saint Mary Euphrasia in the last century.

These conferences are a composite record of spontaneous talks given by Saint Mary Euphrasia, eagerly noted and lovingly remembered by her listeners, and put into their familiar form for posterity. The present translation has been subdivided, making it, as it were, a bedside book of readings.

Let it be remembered that the collection forms a historical document in the sense that it tells us a considerable amount of how conventual life was lived in the springtime of the Institute - a harsh spring indeed, but, burgeoning with vitality, whole-hearted commitment and uncompromising holiness. Where some outward customs are concerned, they are inevitably, out-dated. However it has the period, and have been in common Good Shepherd usage until comparatively recently. The words: **Class**: a classified group in the apostolate. **Penitent**: an accepted term at that time for girls and women of irregular life who wished to change and better themselves. **Magdalen**: the same as above but, in Good Shepherd usage, referring to those with a call to the Religious Life. **Preservation Children**: younger children drawn from morally dangerous situations before they became contaminated. **Children, child**: even now, an affectionate term in French, used by older adults even to other adults, but referring here, mostly, to any of our proteges.

So much for outward customs. Today's sisters may perhaps be disconcerted by Saint Mary Euphrasia's inner attitudes, especially regarding religious authority, poverty and a uniform life style. We must remember that Saint Mary Euphrasia was a product of many centuries' respect for authority, even in civil life. So it was no problem for Religious, at least in theory; their faith, enlightened by Scripture, pointed them to God (via His Vicar on earth and those delegated by him) as it was the Person - not the system - they freely undertook to obey.

Regarding Evangelical Poverty Saint Mary Euphrasia followed faithfully in the footsteps of Christ, the Poor Servant. By necessity she had to work for and count her pennies, but she **wanted** to be poor in fact and in spirit, like Jesus, which is the aim of our vow of Poverty.

In her belief in a uniform life style, or rather a Rule, freely accepted by a group of seekers after union with God, and as a defence against the pressures of the world and personal caprice, our Foundress was in direct line from Saint Benedict and other great founders of Religious Orders. Any viable group in civil life, be it a nation, a school or a club has its statutes, guide lines, codes of practice; for every living body needs its practical bone - strong skeleton! Unfortunately, such a body of laws can become cluttered by outdated and meaningless prescriptions and this is one of the reasons that the Church calls for review and renewal of fervour and authenticity in our way of life. How difficult it is we all know, and Wisdom Himself wants to help us in a world whose attitudes - in spite of the beautiful generosity and tolerance of so many young people - are inclined to be subjective, independence - seeking and materialistic. His body, the Church has asked us to listen to Her, and also to return to our sources for inspiration.

More than for their historicity, the main value of these talks is that they are a school of Christian and Religious virtue, of holiness, the overflow of a life in which those virtues were lived totally, trustingly and lovingly.

When St. Mary Euphrasia came, in obedience, from Tours to Angers, the building put at her disposal was a disused cotton factory beside the river Maine whose waters flowed quietly not far from the windows. There, on the loom of daily circumstances, our saint and her "dear daughters" toiled. The warp of Mary's constant prayer crossing the weft of Martha's orderly and laborious industry produced, hour by hour, the fabric of holiness. And as they laboured we know how much they were aware of the ceaseless murmur of the waters of God's Spirit, a lament echoing deep in our hearts:

Seek my sheep; a soul is of more value than a world!

Sister Mary Aquinas Lee

## CHAPTER 1

### ON THE CHURCH AND THE INSTITUTE

*He sent them out to the lost sheep. (Matt. 10)*

1. My dear daughters, I feel I could never say enough about our Mother the Church, of the love we owe her, and of the obligation we all have to pray fervently for her. No other Congregation should be more attached to her than ours, for there is no other that owes her so much, and has so much need of her protection and help. Love her so that on every occasion she may recognise you as her devoted and submissive children. On arriving at our foundations, think that, as daughters of the Church, you are as it were sent by her. With that in mind, you will approach your protégées and devote yourselves, as apostles, to their salvation.

*Jesus said: "Peace, be still". (Mk. 4:39)*

2. The Church is a ship which defends the treasure of our faith and hope. This vessel, which nothing can destroy, has been voyaging for more than eighteen centuries, carrying its riches to every race on earth. Jesus himself is the Pilot; he holds the rudder and steers her through every danger. It seems sometimes as though Our Lord is sleeping: the storm rages, hell confronts the Church, persecutions threaten to annihilate her. A cry of distress is heard, our loving Saviour rises, with a word calms the storm, and God's ark goes on her assured way across the centuries.

*A man's enemies are those of his own household! (Matt. 10:36)*

3. The Church is a spouse whose inmost being is torn apart by her own children. She is always vilified yet always beautiful! Has there ever been a mother who has given more children to heaven than she? Opening her arms to us on the day of our Baptism, she is extremely concerned for our holiness.

Listen to what an anonymous Catholic writer said recently: "Great works are never achieved without struggle. God, who has given His Church the sublime mission of saving souls, has willed that her earthly existence should be marked by great battles and dreadful trials. We must not be over-alarmed by these attacks coming from all quarters. She has passed through terrible crises, which she has overcome and will always be invincible."

*My steps have kept to your paths,  
my feet have not slipped (Ps. 17)*

4. I would also like to point out what some very reliable people said to me: our little Congregation goes forward as it were in step with the Church. Look at the present prodigious movement for the propagation of the Faith. Well, it is just at this time that our Institute seems to be spreading far and wide. Sheep are entering our folds in large numbers and requests for foundations come from all parts. Rejoice that Rome has agreed to and encouraged our American missions. Suppose the Sovereign Pontiff should tell us himself by our Cardinal Protector: "I want you to found in America; it is my wish, my desire," could we ever be more honoured? Well, my dear daughters, those are the very words the head of the Church addresses to us today! That is why you will found in Montreal and Louisville. Many people will be against this, but they will perish rather than halt the work, for the more it is persecuted, the more heaven will champion it!

*You surround me with favour as with a shield (Ps. 5)*

5. This divine protection has been miraculous since the time of the Generalate's establishment. Certain persons tried to warn the Pope against us, but one day he said: "Well, the more they are calumniated the more I shall uphold them." This holy Pope's love of the Congregation, far from lessening, has only grown stronger. When Cardinal Odeschalchi entered the Company of Jesus, the care of the Institute was entrusted to Cardinal Della Porta. However, on giving him this office of Protector, His Holiness added: "I entrust the business particulars to you, but, as to protection, I reserve that for myself."

*Fear not!*

6. You know, my dear daughters, that the Church is divided, so to say, into three branches which together form only a single body; that is why it is customary to distinguish between the Church Triumphant, the Church Militant, and the Church suffering. The Church Triumphant already possesses perfect bliss; the Church Suffering, it is true, suffers unimaginably, but the poor souls in Purgatory know that the blessed vision of the Lord will surely be theirs; they know that they are being purified so that they may enter the presence of Him from whom no stain is hidden. They suffer for a time only and await the glory that is prepared for them with the saints. They are, moreover, comforted and assuaged every day by the suffrages of the faithful.

The Church has to fight constantly, without relaxing. The very name "Militant" indicates combat! So, my dear daughters, we must struggle against the pull of the world, our faults, and above all against our selfishness. We must have untiring zeal and never fear difficulties. If we have to climb the highest mountains we must do so with courage. Let's imagine that one day we might find every hand against us, we should not be cast down for all that, but remain steadfastly at our post, happy to die consumed by zeal, for then we should be considered martyrs, and would in fact be so.

How did the Apostles act? They were arrested and put in prison. No sooner were they let out, than they hastened to preach everywhere! It is impossible for us to be Religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd without this costing us dear. Satan hates you, my dear daughters; he will follow you relentlessly, because he most detests those who not only work at their own sanctification but also consecrate themselves to working for the salvation of souls. Let us always be ready for the fight and come to the battle-field provided with trustworthy weapons: prayer, obedience, and above all the desire to sacrifice ourselves for God's glory.

*Peter was kept in prison,  
but the Church prayed for him. (Acts 12)*

7. So let us always pray for the Church, holy and inviolable as she is, the Church you love so much! We mustn't be afraid of sacrificing ourselves, of immolating ourselves, so that she may multiply her conquests, and be revealed, more and more, in the splendour of her beauty. The Institute is founded to work not only for the salvation of those near to us, but also for the salvation of little pagans, Ethiopians, idolators.

*My soul finds rest in God alone;  
my salvation comes from him. (Ps. 62)*

8. When Saint Teresa founded her monasteries, she had at heart a special aim: to establish centres of prayer to help the Church, to make reparation for the offences done to God by His implacable enemies. This saint lived at a time when the Church was being persecuted, above all by the Lutheran heretics who were making frightful ravages. But now there are only too many other Luthers, other Calvins, although not bearing those names. Alas! What reasons for sorrow in our unhappy times .....

Saint Teresa said: "As I had only my prayers to prove my love for God, I ceaselessly offered them to Him. I urged my companions to do the same and I tried to kindle in them a burning desire for the salvation of souls and the growth of the Church. The graces given me by the Lord were very great but it seemed that, being concentrated within me, they were useless. I felt a holy envy for those who, wishing to make Christ Jesus known, had also the good fortune to consecrate themselves to such a beautiful work, even risking their lives a thousand times to assure the triumph of such a glorious cause." The great saint also said: " I must admit that a burning thirst for the salvation of souls is the most powerful of the attractions God has given me. Moreover, when I read the lives of saints who, by their apostolic labours, win adorers to God, I feel moved to the depths, I shed tears and am more envious of them than of martyrs. In my view, Our Lord prizes a soul we have gained for Him by our work and prayers aided by his mercy, more than all other services we could do for him." I often think that if Saint Teresa had lived today she would have been a Sister of the Good Shepherd, given her great attraction for the conversion of souls. Besides that, her mission has the same objective as ours, although it appears to be quite different. A Religious Order was needed especially to pray and do

violence to heaven, so that our paths might be prepared before we entered the lists, as well as while we are in the thick of battle.

*The Lord is my banner!*

*Lift up your hands to the throne of God! (Ex. 17)*

9. We read in Scripture that when King Amalec planned to destroy the people of Israel, who were wandering exhausted in the desert, Moses told Joshua to choose courageous men and march against the enemy. He promised that, during the battle, he would stay at the top of a nearby hill to observe and to implore the help of the Most High. And Scripture adds that when Moses prayed, hands raised to heaven, the Israeli Army was victorious but when, overcome by weariness, he lowered them somewhat, Amalec gained the advantage. So Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms until the Amalakites were completely defeated. Joshua put them to flight or to the edge of the sword. And that, my dear daughters, is what we do and what the holy Carmelites do. The latter are on the mountain praying with fervour, fasting, practising austerities and lifting their hands to heaven, that we may gain the victory when we are fighting hand to hand with the evil one.

So let us have a great devotion to Saint Teresa and look on her as one of the principal protectresses of the Institute. Try and imitate her incomparable fervour and her tender love for the Church. One could say that this seraphic virgin died from the force of her love, and we read in her life that her last words were: "I die a faithful daughter of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church!" If we are faithful to our vocation, we could add: "I die a true daughter of the Good Shepherd!"

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DOUBLE END OF OUR VOCATION: THE AMENDMENT OF MORALS AND THE STRENGTHENING OF FAITH IN SOULS

*Your adversary, the devil prowls round .....  
resist him, firm in your faith. (JPet. 5:8-9)*

1. Our holy congregation has two aims, my dear daughters; to reform morals and to strengthen souls in the Faith. The devil, who is always furious at losing his power over souls, seeing some of the immense good this Institute will do, raised a raging storm of obstacles and calumnies to kill it at birth, and since then has waged relentless war against it. We must resist the efforts of our enemy by leading humble and modest lives totally sacrificed to the glory of God. It is only by this mortified life and by suffering that we prepare to withstand the struggles ahead.

Each of us should work to arm herself with the Church's doctrine, thoroughly learning the truths of our faith so that we may not be tempted to waver at the least breath like a feeble reed. We must not risk being lost and allowing souls to be lost, for want of instruction in the creed each must profess.

*You cannot give what you have not got. (Anon.)*

2. The Lord has willed, in his overflowing love, to choose you - yes, you! - to be guides for other souls, leading them back to him. He does not wish you to be "empty cisterns"; (Job 2:13) others should profit from the abundance with which he has enriched you, the graces he offers you continually. He wants your virtues to spread abroad the fragrance of Jesus Christ. Our vocation is a call to zeal, an apostolate of Charity. Take note: our whole life must be consecrated to the spread of the faith and to leading souls to holiness. We must mould hearts and to do that we must teach them. This means we have to break down ignorance, enlighten minds by the study of the truths of religion and, above all, place well in the forefront of our own minds our most deeply rooted convictions. In this way we shall inspire those in our care and give them, not only a ready guide on life's road, but also a sensitive conscience to alert them should they be tempted to sin. In this way too we shall exercise our fourth vow which one could say is the essence of our vocation, the other three being directed towards the supreme object of the Congregation.

*We are ambassadors for Christ,  
God making his appeal through us. (Rom. 10: 13)*

3. All religious institutes have both a common and a particular aim. All of them have, as their common aim, the service of God and to give him glory by the practice of the evangelical counsels. However, as there are many mansions in our Father's house, so there are various families and different functions. Our own special function as Religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, our calling is not only to sanctify and save ourselves; it is, still more, to work for the sanctification of others. Regarding the various aims of different institutes, I would like to quote the words of a much respected prelate: "Nearly every community makes, as you do, perpetual vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. But in addition, every Institute has its own particular aims. The Visitation Sisters, for example, pray, sing God's praises and also educate young girls. The Carmelites pray and give themselves to penance. The Sisters of St. Joseph pray and bring up poor children. The Sisters of charity pray and care for the sick and prisoners, in fact, they are to be met wherever there is some human misery to relieve. And you? What special aim have you in your vocation? It is also charity, and even if you are not called Sisters of Charity, you do bear the name of Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. So what does this title mean? It means that you consecrate your life to charity under the name and protection of the Blessed Virgin." From her first day in a house to the last, a servant undertakes to fulfil the wishes of her mistress in everything. The mistress, for her part, undertakes to maintain the servant and to give her a just wage. One could say there is a similar contract between you and Mary from the day you entered this Institute of the Good Shepherd. You, on your side, have undertaken to work in a special way for the conversion of souls, to change the sinful into the penitent



Magdalen. The Blessed Virgin has promised, in return, to cover you with her special protection so long as you faithfully fulfil the obligations of your contract.

*Faith comes from hearing the message  
- the Word of Christ. (Rom. 10: 17)*

4. Now, understand that the great means of working for the salvation of souls is to instruct them in the truths of the Faith, to imprint these firmly in their hearts, that is to say, catechising and explaining the lessons of the Gospel - this is the only road leading to Christian sanctity. We also have orphans and boarders in separate young peoples' groups for moral care and protection. You will succeed in forming all these by giving them solid teaching on religious things, in such a way that faith may send its roots deep into their souls, and make them appreciate the beauty of holiness.

So, my dear daughters, apply yourselves to religious study that you may be good teachers to your children. I cannot recommend too much the study of the Catechism; you should keep it by you. However long you may live you will always need sound doctrine for yourselves and for others. Often read the lives of the saints and Church history. Never read unorthodox books and do not give your girls light reading which you have not read yourselves. Church history will give you plenty of subject matter for the instructions you will have to give in the sections. The girls will enjoy listening to you and you will be doing them good. In the Gospel we read: "Mary kept all these things in her heart." (Luke 2:51) This is how the doctors of the Church interpret these words: Mary kept this treasury of truths in her heart so as to impart it to the Church for the instruction of the Faithful. Also one of the reasons why her Divine Son left her so long on earth was that she might teach Christians when the Faith began to spread through the world. And when the boy Jesus left His parents and stayed behind in the temple, talking and listening to the doctors of the Law, he wished to show us the need to learn, so that we can enlighten others. So, my dear daughters, don't on any account neglect your religious studies, remembering what the Gospel says: "If the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch. (Matt. 3:14)

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly  
as you teach. (Col. 3:16)*

5. Nothing is more dangerous than ignorance. Could one find a more senseless person than one who does not know his Faith? "Have you found a wise man? Wear out his doorstep!" (Eccl. 6:36) Moreover, our religious studies should always be based on humility. This will prevent our shortsightedness presuming to plumb the fathomless secrets of God's infinite wisdom. That is why anyone, who aspires to rise above himself on wings of pride to probe divine mysteries, unfortunately falls into the depths of error. Think of Tertullian to whom one might apply the words: "Take care not to be too clever!" That means, according to theologians, we must not presume to scrutinize the mysteries of faith because they are beyond the reach of human understanding. Whoever would be too learned ends by knowing nothing! Instead of becoming wise he becomes foolish because of his presumption and pride. All the same, one may say there is more to fear for an ignorant person than for a well-instructed one; the latter may, in fact, be capable of listening to the voice of conscience and come to repentance. Whereas, what hope of conversion is there for a poor, ignorant being who has never heard of God and does not know what vice and virtue mean?

*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news! (Rom. 10:14-15)*

6. As you know, my dear daughters, there are seven spiritual works of mercy. One of the most important is to instruct the ignorant. So, thoroughly teach the young persons and children entrusted to you. Here I must caution you to be on your guard against innovations in the matter of morals and doctrine lest you be liable to fall into errors. A Superior should be prudent and take precautions about this. The poison of false doctrine may well creep into communities, like a snake stealing through grass. One knows, in fact, of communities who were totally infected without being aware of it. The celebrated Abbey of Port-Royal had the misfortune to allow itself to be lured by the sophistries of the Jansenists. The young Abbess, Angélique Arnauld, installed by the King when she was only fourteen, had good qualities and, in spite of some natural defects of character, she tried in all simplicity to do good. She even wanted to leave her abbey and become a novice in the newly-founded order of the Visitation. She did not do so because St. Francis de Sales felt he should not allow it. Later, without

realising what she was doing, she put herself under the direction of the leader of the Jansenists whom she believed to be men of great virtue and piety. She was lured, with all the Sisters, into error. This was the cause of the Abbey's suppression.

Anxious to warn us against such novel and false doctrines, the Apostle, St. Paul says: "Be no longer like children who can be made to believe anything, nor like fickle people who let themselves be carried away by the winds of human opinion." (*Eph. 4:14*) And elsewhere: "Take care not to be caught off guard and be robbed of your Faith." So you too, my dear daughters, take good care; never allow your faith to weaken. Learn! Inform yourselves! Don't be afraid to go back to the basic truths of our faith, to read, and re-read the Epistles and Gospels.

*Watch out for false prophets.*

*They come to you in sheep's clothing,*

*but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (Matt. 7:15)*

7. Cling to Catholic doctrine and don't deviate from it by a hair's breadth! It is said of St. Paula that when a false pilgrim, infected by the heresy of Origen, came unknown to Saint Jerome to visit her in Bethlehem and spoke to her with so much cunning and charm, the saint was momentarily confused. Again, we read in the life of Saint Ignatius, that the heretics, resentful at the formation given to this group of celebrated men, decided to contaminate it with their false tenets. So, first they sent one of their young disciples from Germany to Rome. This wily hypocrite managed to be accepted as a novice, and laid his plans to inject their very heart with heretical poison. He seemed to be the most observant of them all; he frequented the Sacraments all the more for not believing in them. Then he began to say quietly to one of his companions, who worked with him in the refectory, that he had certain doubts about the cult of religious images; the authority of the Roman Pontiff; that he rather questioned the real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and so on. Then, under pretext of explaining his doubts, he made a point of giving his companion lessons in false dogma. The devout and intelligent novice whom he had first aimed at, with a view to attacking others more easily later, soon realised there was a very wicked wolf in the fold! He wrote down everything the tempter said and noted that he had proposed more than twenty five errors. He informed his Superiors of the situation, and the wolf was chased from the fold before any harm was done. You see, my dear daughters, the lengths to which the followers of the Evil one will go to gain souls. So, it is essential for us to be very wise and truly enlightened, in order to protect ourselves against their scheming. I feel I should tell you, by way of widening your experience, that in one of our houses lately, one of the girls tried to destroy a sister's vocation by her arguments against the Faith. Be prudent and watchful. Cling to Obedience, to your rules and Constitutions. That is the surest way to remain always faithful to Our Lord's teaching from which, alone, both you and your neighbour may hope to have light, justice and holiness. We counsel you again to speak often among yourselves of the Church to keep you in the love and submission you owe her. Speak of her to your dear children and so lead them to know and cling to her, and to our women and girls to awaken, to preserve and to strengthen their faith. Above all, we would like the Sisters who give religious instruction to announce, without fail, the coming feasts and to say a few words about them; this will accustom the hearts they are forming to enter into the spirit of the Church.

*If you pour yourself out for the hungry*

*...then shall your light rise. (Is. 58: 10)*

8. Instruct all in a kindly and attractive way. Let them be persuaded that all you want is to enrich them. Give your lesson in such a way that it really teaches them something. For example, when you speak to them of the light of the Gospel which has spread all over the world, be sure to make them reflect how this light has enlightened them also and has led them to God's house. Give weight to your words by citing Scripture. and, finally, tell them some apt story. If you are speaking about penance, you could well mention the Fathers of the Desert. These poor girls enjoy instructions which are made more understandable by examples. Oh, how many times I used this method successfully; they behaved themselves and were quiet! Just the promise to give them one such instruction was enough to keep them in order and obedient for several days. Poor children! Battered by the stormy world they have met with nothing but suffering. Some of them have never experienced the sweetness and attractiveness of virtue; it is for you to give them a taste of it. To do this, don't waste time talking only of things that momentarily move their hearts, leaving nothing of permanent worth behind. Rather,

enlighten them and nourish their minds by wise teaching. In this way you will work efficaciously towards reforming their morals, you will raise their self-image and you will achieve the double aim of our Congregation.

Remember the words of St. Paul: "I have made myself all things to all in order to gain all for Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 9:22) The Church has done this ever since.

*And I hold in veneration  
For the love of Him alone,  
Holy Church as His Creation:  
And her teaching as His own. (J.H. Newman)*

9. We have only two means of progress, the Gospel and our Constitutions, we can use them both at the same time, or rather we should go from one to the other all the time. Oh, how I glory in the fact that our Congregation is so firmly bound to the Church! It is the Church which brought us to birth, it is the surest hope of our survival. In fact, as soon as we conceived the idea of the Generalate, our first step was to throw ourselves into the heart of the Church and that is why we are so loved by the Sovereign Pontiff. In short, dear Sisters, I have such confidence in the Church, that when she speaks I believe her as though our Lord himself were speaking.

## CHAPTER 3

### AFTER OUR MOTHER FOUNDRESS'S JOURNEY TO ROME

**Departure from Angers: Easter Tuesday, 17th April, 1838**

**Return to Angers: 17th July, 1838**

*I will set over them one Shepherd  
and He shall feed them. (Ezek. 34:23)*

1. Never forget that this house of Angers, legitimately called the Mother House, has particular graces to govern others - it alone received a special blessing from the Holy Apostolic See. When, my dear daughters, you go by Holy Obedience to another foundation never fail to take the Mother House as your model, and not any other house even if, to you, it seems perfect.

Now, you are all familiar with ivy - a weak plant, which without support cannot stay upright. However, put it near an oak, it clings to it with all its might, grows upwards and never dies. We cling to our great oak, Rome. In that way we shall have strength and support in difficult times. I don't mean that Rome could ever be involved in all the little problems we might run into. nor do I want to delude myself that it could never happen that Rome, on certain occasions, would see fit to correct or reprove us. We know that Rome is a mother and we also know that mothers often have to correct their children. "Where is the son," says St. Paul, "that is never corrected by his father?" (*Heb. 12:7*)

It could also happen that false information be given to Rome, that a proud and discontented Religious deceive Superiors. Never let that disturb you - the truth always prevails in Rome. Our work is God's work, he will protect it! Like sunflowers that look towards the sun and as a compass needle seeks the pole, so your minds should always turn to our Lord, to Rome, to the Congregation.

*The Church, Mother of Martyrs, Mother of Saints! (Anon)*

2. My dear daughters, I cannot express the emotion our Sisters and I felt on entering Rome! As soon as we glimpsed the holy city we knelt and reverently kissed its blessed soil. In the Vatican, before the altar beneath which the body of St. Peter rests, I felt urged to promise God that I would, if necessary, give my life for each of our foundations. At that same moment Sr. Thérèse of Jesus (de Couespel) made the same promise. The Holy Father and their Eminences the Cardinals gave us the most fatherly signs of interest and affection for our work. Cardinal Odescalchi -such an example of humility and every virtue! - told us that on the Feast of the Annunciation, having celebrated Mass in St. Peter's, he said to himself, "Why couldn't there be a Congregation of Sisters who would, as far as they were able, do good as the Jesuits do and take charge of women's prisons? That same day the Cardinal received my letter which began, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word." Deeply moved, he at once understood that our request for a Generalate was according to the will of God. His Eminence let us know that this letter with its expressions of submission, made such an impression on him that he resolved at that moment to found a house of the Institute, which he afterwards did. So you see, my dear daughters, that it says clearly in Article 5 of the first Constitution, that we may accept houses of detention for women. He told us that the day the Generalate was approved by the Sacred Congregation numbering many Bishops and Religious, they had never seen such a unanimous vote. Thirteen letters had been written against us and in spite of the bad impression they might well have made on the assembly, no one refused his vote. Our petition asked that the Generalate should be for all the houses we might found in France. Hearing this, Father Kohlman, the Jesuit Consultor, rose and said to Cardinal Odescalchi, Vicar to His Holiness, "I humbly ask your Eminence to change the word 'France' to Universe ".....So you would like to create another Society of Jesus?"

.....«Exactly! .....And so it shall be,» answered the Cardinal, "Really this work could only be universal. Holy Father, there is but one heart and one voice in favour of the Congregation of the Good Shepherd." "And I also give it my heart and voice," replied the Holy Father. He told us that he considers our Institute one of the brightest jewels in his crown.

*We will no longer be children blown about  
by every wind of Doctrine. (Eph. 4:14)*

3. Oh, let us try to measure up to the opinion of the Head of the Church, remaining faithful to our observances and Constitutions! Don't waver, my dear daughters, as do fickle people; preserve intact the sacred deposit of our vocation, do not be shaken by every gust of wind, like cowardly souls. You may, perhaps, be advised with the best of intentions, to introduce novelties into the Congregation. It is for you to hold firmly to what is laid down, never listening to a whisper of an alien influence nor anything that is not in line with our rules. Preserve your religious observances in their primitive purity. Inform yourselves down to the least details of everything to do with the Institute. Be very recollected gathering, crumb by crumb, like little birds, the spiritual nourishment given to you. If one of you should be light, giddy, inattentive, the instructions given will be of no use, one might just as well throw wheat into the river!

*By reason of our vow of Obedience  
we obey the Pope as our highest Superior (Const. 24)*

4. Remember, my dear daughters, that nothing may be changed in our Rules and Constitutions without the authorisation of the Sovereign Pontiff who has confirmed each and every one of them by the Brief erecting the Generalate. (April 51h, 1835) So if ever some difficulty should arise, we must refer it to our Cardinal Protector, we must turn to Rome, from there will come light. You are, forever, under the protection of the Church, and as the Church cannot fail, it is impossible that a Religious Congregation should perish so long as it stays faithfully obedient to her divine authority. Should it suffer persecution the Church would protect it as a mother protects a child in danger. If, in certain environments, this tree cannot bear fruit, the Church will transplant it with maternal wisdom.

*Blest thy children, mighty Mother,  
safe the wanderer at thy hearth (A. de Vere)*

5. Never tire of thanking the Lord for the great benefit of being born in the bosom of the holy, apostolic and Roman Church; you have the honour of being her daughters twice over. You are at the gate of heaven, only one step and you can enter! If, unhappily, one of you should fall she must not lose heart, she must trust in God and get up at once. Let us people the church with saints. Christ's Vicar on earth rejoices every time we ask to establish another house. Priests who work for the salvation of souls, often would not know where to place in safety their trophies snatched from hell, if our houses were not there to offer them shelter promptly.

*"Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit;  
Serve the Lord." (Rom. 12:11)*

6. I feel consumed by zeal when I reflect on our Vocation. It most closely resembles a missionary calling. Sometimes I seem to hear pathetic little voices crying, "Mother, Mother, come and save us!" We must pray much, the Lord wants us to ask urgently if we desire answers to prayer; he wants us to be people of work, prayer and sacrifice. We are not to be inert like stagnant water! We must know how to bear patiently crosses, humiliations and contradictions if we wish to draw down on ourselves and on the Institute the blessings of heaven.

*Count it all joy when you meet various trials. (Jas. 1: 2)*

7. Formerly, I felt opposition very much, especially when it came from certain persons. Now, my soul remains serene in every circumstance. When, in Rome, I gazed at the catacombs where the martyrs bones had laid, the horrible pit into which the Apostles were let down through a narrow opening, the Coliseum where so many generous souls suffered such cruel tortures, I said to myself, "What are our sufferings, our hardships, compared to such torments?" So let us suffer in union with the Church which in every age has had to bear calumnies, troubles and persecution. By suffering, zeal and prayer, closely united to the Church militant, you will comfort the Church suffering and open the way to become, (even if by martyrdom) a part of the Church triumphant. Moreover, my dear daughters, by carrying your cross generously in the faithful observance of our Holy Constitutions, Directory and Spiritual Exercises, you may have the honour of being reckoned almost as martyrs. So

be very fervent; God has great plans for each of you. Ask him to give you his love, the love of souls, and you will see what marvels this divine love will work in you!

I shall often speak to you about Rome and the wonderful things I saw there. I shall always cherish delightful memories of the Sacred Heart of the Trinita dei Monte. of the fine Superior of that house. What a religious spirit! How faultless all those ladies!

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CONGREGATION WAS FOUNDED FOR THE LOVE OF SOULS WE MUST UPHOLD IT BY THIS LOVE

*Your Father in heaven does not want any  
of these little ones to be lost. (Matt. 18:14)*

1. The following passage of the Gospels exactly reflects our vocation: "A woman having lost a drachma searched for it all over the house and when she had found it, gathered together her neighbours and friends to rejoice with her." (Luke 15:8) Our drachma are our dear penitents. Rejoice at their entry into the sheepfold, for they are like coins which were lost and now are found. These dear children were yours before you ever knew them; you should love them, my dear daughters, and you will reach heaven only by working for them. Try to lead them back to God, that is your vocation to which the Lord has willed to call you and for which he has picked you out from among so many others in the Church's great family. A religious of our Congregation can be esteemed only in proportion to the love she has for our dear protégées, and her devotion to their salvation.

Only this morning we welcomed a poor young person, aged twenty five years, who was in such extreme misery that she was brought to despair. Among other things I asked her: "Have you made your first Communion?" "Perhaps I have," she answered, "but, really I don't understand what first communion means. I remember that, once when I was very ill, they brought what they called viaticum, but I don't know what that is. I don't know anything but sin and hell." Then I asked her if she would like something to eat. "Oh, Mother," she said, "no sooner am I here than you offer me something to eat. Do you know, yesterday I was very hungry but I found no-one to offer me anything. I feel ashamed to come to you in this state. I would have liked to beg for clothes that were less grimy." So saying, she wept and her tears broke my heart. "Did you ever think, dear child, of praying to the Blessed Virgin?" "Oh, yes," she replied, "even when I was plunged in the worst disorders, I never forgot to say a Hail Mary every day." It happened that a kindly person met this poor child and, seeing her miserable condition, she had compassion on her and brought her here. That is typical of Our Lady's protection, she whose mercy is so wonderful even towards sinners who scarcely know her.

*"I saw that all compassion to one's neighbour,  
exercised in love, is a mark of God's indwelling. (Cf. Julian of Norwich)*

2. Oh, how unworthy would we be of the title "Cooperators" of our Divine Saviour if we weren't moved by great kindness and charity for our Good penitents! Remember, my dear daughters, that they call you by the sweet name of Mother; you must, in fact be their mothers according to grace, to bring them up in the grace and love of the Lord. Your part is to co-operate in their spiritual re-birth, to revive divine life in them. There should be a kind of holy rivalry among you to contribute as far as possible, whatever work you may do, to the noble aim of sanctifying souls.

Like a fond mother who loves her children without limits, love our girls whether you work directly with them or not; love them whatever their natural defects, however little attraction you feel because of their wretchedness; love with a sympathy inspired by faith, seeing them as children of God. Love all of them sincerely in God without familiarity, without rudeness and, above all, without special friendships; otherwise you will be ruined and the penitents will have no respect for you. By now you will have understood in what way I urge you to love them! At the same time, I warn you to be on your guard against being taken in by their wiles; fear these as you would a serpent's cunning! Remember, moreover, that while we study these poor children in order to know them, they observe us shrewdly, not to say maliciously, and seek to know us too. Be convinced that they study us from top to toe and constantly scrutinize us; it is essential that their watchful eyes never see anything disedifying in us.

*He who heeds discipline  
shows the way to life. (Prov. 10: 17)*

3. A sister who does not love obedience and a disciplined life can be sure she will not convert anyone. Without a solid and constant spiritual life she will do no good to souls. I would really suffer, my dear daughters, if I knew that any Sister did not want to work with the penitents, that she was not happy in the Apostolate. Do you know what one must think of those who voice such discontent? One would have to conclude that the zeal for souls which we must have, has been stifled in them by too great a desire for a quiet life, by their need to satisfy their personal tastes and to enjoy the conveniences of life. They don't understand that those attitudes are incompatible with devotedness and charity for our neighbour. Usually people prefer what can be seen. Take the education of the young. There is nothing so delightful as to bring up nice little girls, or to care for the sick, because these works are outwardly visible. But souls! What more hidden than souls? Nothing shows! It is said that it is very difficult to convert sinners. That is quite true, but what may be impossible for others is possible for a Good Shepherd Sister. A real Religious who leaves everything for God and, what is much harder, leaves herself, will convert sinners and many of them.

*Clothe yourselves with humility (IPet. 5:5)*

4. I am happy to be able to say that our beloved Sister Marie Thérèse of Jesus (de Couespel) merits to be held up as an example of one who understands the spirit of our vocation. We wrote telling her to leave Rome. On reading the letter she said she seemed to hear a voice saying: "Go quickly. Think that awaiting you are souls to be gained." She sensed that she would not come back to Angers for a while and she was not mistaken for, when she arrived at Nice, the Bishop prevented her from going on and kept her to found a new house. A distinguished personality of rare merit, she is a great benefactress, a sister possessing all kinds of good qualities who could be at the head of more considerable works. However, far from aiming at the best position, she begged us to send a Superior capable of directing affairs according to the spirit of the Congregation, offering to give her an exact account of everything and then, with our permission, of withdrawing to care only for the penitents, the work in which she finds her consolation and happiness. In the face of such an example could anyone admit to a dislike of working in the classes, or have difficulty in obeying when it was a question of helping in one of our houses? You are shepherdesses responsible for the sheep, and don't fancy caring for the flock! Whatever could the Divine Shepherd do with you, He into whose service you freely entered? M. de Neuville, who is much more severe than I, often tells me that I ought to say these things to every postulant, that I should never leave them in doubt as to the difficulties in our vocation and our obligations. If, after that, one of them declares that her intention was not to go in for such hard work because she prefers meditation and resting in God, I should at once say to her: "God bless you, my child! Seek admission to the Carmelites or the Visitandines: God is certainly not calling you here! "

*I loved with all the strength of my soul. (S.M.E.)*

5. In our Institute we can only do some good in proportion to our desire to give ourselves to the salvation of our neighbour. This must also be said: if we have succeeded to some extent in accomplishing our aims, it is only by virtue of the love full of zeal we have shown our dear protégées. People understand that the Institute was founded only for the love of souls.

Certainly I had no money, no talents nor any outward appeal; I just loved our girls always, and I loved them with all the strength of my soul! I even made a vow never to refuse anyone because they couldn't pay, and you see, my dear daughters, in spite of that we are none the poorer. May you understand more and more the extent of your obligations with regard to our penitents, that is one of my most heartfelt prayers. God is widening our apostolate, and keeps giving us new ones; these are the motives which should make you redouble your efforts towards holiness and fervour until the perfect day dawns in heaven

*In the world who would have  
spared us a thought? (S.M.E.)*



6. The gifts and benefactions we receive are not for us but for the persons who need our care. Really, it is not we, not our poor selves who draw down the blessings of the Sovereign Pontiff, the encouragement of Bishops, the protection of governments, of whatever kind. All this is due to our vocation, to the zeal and love we have for our charges. In fact, had we stayed in the world, would the Pope, the Bishops, the great ones of the world have spared us a thought? So you see, it is our duty to acquire the virtues proper to our calling, and to labour effectively in the holy works to which we are Consecrated.

A good Bishop has just sacrificed a great part of his income in favour of one of our houses. Do you imagine that this zealous prelate would have done that merely in order to have a few more Sisters in his diocese? Certainly not! Perhaps the learning and even the holiness of some Sisters might be admired, but that would not suffice to prompt such a degree of charity. Only the desire for the salvation of souls could do that. The religious to whom, lately, we were happy to offer hospitality for several days, said: " Oh. what are we beside the Good Shepherd Sisters!" Do you suppose it is the graciousness, the kindness of some novices that inspired such comments? Of course not! What filled them with admiration is the order, the regularity of the Offices, each one's eagerness for the good of our children, the spirit of sacrifice, the devotedness of the sisters-in-charge, nothing else. You are looked on as so many saints, my dear daughters; for that reason you are wanted on all sides, missionaries and other zealous persons ask for you. So you must take good care not to disappoint those who have confidence in you. By that I mean, you really must be saints. Forge ahead, then, twice as quickly on the road to perfection! St. Jeanne Frances de Chantal's novices had become, after some months, so holy that she could do anything with them. How I wish I could be given her spirit of holiness, at least for a year, in order to form quickly in the Novitiate, heads of classes, superiors, foundresses. They are very necessary for we have projects which lack dynamism and need our help

*God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion for ever. (Ps. 72)*

7. A Sister of the Good Shepherd must find contentment in the foundations and in our works. She mustn't say: "I prefer to be in Angers, I don't feel I could settle down here." Or, "Another charge would suit me better." Could she be considered a good religious? No, not even a good Christian, because shouldn't a Christian feel obliged to put up with contradictions and make some sacrifices? How many people in the world are crossed from morning till night and silently resign themselves to their lot? So how can religious complain when things don't suit them - the very people who must learn to love the cross which is inseparable from holiness? Believe me, if the love of the cross, the desire to suffer, and self-denial were to die out in the Institute, it would be on the point of perishing. Suppose that, yielding to your entreaties, I let myself be persuaded to give you the choice of the place to which you most fancied going, or to give you work most according to your tastes, be sure that you would be more miserable than you can imagine! You would be unhappy in this life because of the remorse that would torment you, and in the next where you would feel the full weight of God's strict judgment. I know you suffer when it comes to leaving the Mother House, you even shed many tears, keenly feeling the separation from everything you hold most dear; that is a very natural reaction of your grateful hearts and I don't blame you for it - quite the contrary. I like to see this tender religious affection, and I am sure that as long as sorrow is felt on leaving the Mother House, the Institute will live and flourish.

*What does it profit a man to gain the  
whole world and lose his own soul? (Mk. 8:36)*

8. Remember that our Congregation was founded solely by love of souls, you will uphold it only by that love. Do you know what I call the love we must have for souls? I call it the love of appreciation. Saints love souls because they cost our Lord's blood. They esteem the soul of a poor ragged child full of faults, and the soul of a great sinner, because these souls are loved by God, and our Lord shed His blood to redeem them. St. Francis Xavier was moved by these thoughts when he hastened to the conquest of souls. A sister who was afraid of trouble and difficulties, a sister who said: "Oh, I fancy this or that," thinking only of her own satisfaction, that sister, alas, would not possess a true love for souls! If she gave more thought to the sins and blasphemies our Saviour suffers from the godless, and from the faults of those he has chosen for himself, faults more painful to him for that very reason, she would change her attitude! Again, if such a Sister pondered on the goodness and patience of Him who

holds sin in horror and who could with a word, annihilate the world, but does not do so because he loves us, oh, certainly zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls would never be wanting to her in any circumstances. Dear God! what are we doing in this world and why are we here, if not to help in the salvation of our neighbours. Let us unite ourselves to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament: there He is, continually annihilated, offering himself as Victim to his Father in reparation for the injuries and crimes of misguided souls who close their eyes to the evils which their sins draw down on themselves. Jesus, however, loves them and, for them, ceaselessly shows his Father his Body covered with the wounds he freely accepted. These souls are his and belong to him by so many titles that He wants all of them to be saved and remain his own.

*He loves us to distraction! (S.M.E.)*

9. He came on earth to redeem and save them. Heaven was moved by amazement on seeing how this incomprehensible mystery was brought about, a mystery to which each Person of the Most Holy Trinity contributed, so to speak, in a special way. The Eternal Father gave what He most loved, His own Son, that this mission of love to His creatures might be accomplished, He sent a messenger, the Archangel Gabriel to the Holy Virgin. She was already full of grace and heaven's priceless gifts - her creator's masterpiece. The celestial ambassador speeds from above and announces to this privileged creature the plans and decrees of God's boundless mercy for mankind. The Holy Spirit only awaits the consent of the purest of Virgins to enter in and fill her with His holiness. Then occurred those wonders our feeble intelligence can never understand. For whom do you think has the Lord done such things? Perhaps for special souls, His friends? Oh, no, my dear daughters; these things happened for fallen creatures, who had lost their way and abandoned the right road. Now you see, how God loves! He loves us to distraction! and shall we never do anything for him? Shall we never repay him in some way? Oh, yes indeed. We shall lead back to Him some of those souls His heart loves so much. Then, when we die, at that supreme moment when we must appear before our only Love, then, I say, those souls whom we will have sent before us to heaven, will come and lay at our feet their palms and crowns, recognizing in us the instruments God used to gain their love. Imagine our joy! What a feast! What celebrations in heaven when Good Shepherd Sisters make their triumphant entry!

*Offer to the Lord whatever you do. (Prov. 16:3)*

10. I will end here, my dear daughters; this subject I have touched on suggests so much to say that I could talk till cockcrow! Love your dear children more and more; cherish your priceless vocation for which you should be unendingly grateful to the mysterious goodness of God. Whether you are busy sewing or writing or cooking or anything else, always remember to have the intention of working for souls. You know the Son of God's mission on earth; reflect that, in a way, you are privileged to have a similar vocation. What an honour! Be proud of the noble work entrusted to you. Let us present our Lord with souls who have cost Him his blood and His life, tokens of our love and, as it were, claims to the eternal reward He is preparing for us.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE INSTITUTE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS AN INSTITUTE OF FAITH AND LOVE

*You shall go ahead of the Lord  
to make known to his people  
the forgiveness of their sins  
and the love of the Heart of our God (Luke 1:77-78)*

1. I never cease asking our Lord that our dear Novitiate may uphold the holiness and honour of the congregation. Yes, indeed, my dear daughters, become holy in your vocation! Remember that to enter into the spirit of this vocation and to make it your treasure, you should keep yourselves hidden; contrive to be forgotten, to have no desire to be noticed and to want nothing merely to satisfy your self-love. Don't be afraid to say, "We are counted as the refuse of the world," (I Cor: 4:13) since the Apostle of the Gentiles did not hesitate to say it himself. You know that, after our sanctification, our commitment is to work for the salvation of souls. We have the mission to welcome with open arms the most abandoned souls. There is no misery, no spiritual wound, however repulsive, that we should not try to cure with the help of grace. So when Obedience calls, always be ready to go to the conquest of souls. Don't panic at the prospect of the obstacles, difficulties and struggles you are bound to meet with as you devote yourselves to the beautiful task of freeing from Satan's shackles, souls in the darkness and shadow of death.

*Many waters cannot quench love. (S. O. S. 8:7)*

2. Meanwhile work hard to grow in the love of your vocation and the zeal proper to it. Oh, what wonderful things love does! What undertakings brought to fulfilment by the power of love! Our Institute was founded by love; you were led here by the love of God. Oh, let us proclaim it aloud! You are not slaves cowed by coercion! You are the beloved daughters of the Heart of Jesus, victim of Love himself whom you carry in your souls. I am sure you will remain steadfast - even to death - in this love, always joyous and contented in your vocation.

*Faith is the beginning and love is the end. (Liturgy)*

3. Our Institute is one of Faith as well as Love. Faith is a gift of God; it is the root and foundation of the greatest virtues. A Sister with lively faith sees God every where and in everything and so her obedience is perfect. Her spirit, intellect and will are submissive. If our actions were done in the spirit of faith they would all become meritorious and would be ascribed to us for justice and sanctification as, of old, was Abraham's firm belief. God had told this saintly Patriarch that, in his old age, he would become father of a mighty nation and that his descendants would be as countless as the stars. Abraham believed the word of God against all reason, even when he was ordered to sacrifice his only son - the son of God's promise. He hoped against hope, depending on his faith in the unchanging word of God. That is why I thoroughly approve of those Sisters who invoke this holy Patriarch to obtain the gift of a living faith.

It is the spirit of faith which motivates the entire spiritual life. It is impossible for our actions to be as perfect as they should be if they are not inspired by faith. Above all, notice that a soul of faith is not clamorous. She isn't given to breaking religious silence, to making a noise in the cloister or in choir. Rather, she is peaceful and goes about without attracting attention. A very old hymn expresses it:

**I see Faith wrapped in modest guise;  
By day she passes scarcely seen,  
At night, torch high, she walks serene.**

*My real life is the faith  
I have in the Son of God  
who loved me and gave  
Himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)*

4. If You have faith, my dear daughters, you will rejoice in this sentence which could be applied to you: "The just man lives by faith." And again: "Those who have instructed others in the ways of righteousness will shine like stars for all eternity." (*Dan. 12:13*) You are of that number, you who live by faith and you have been promised that you will shine among the blessed by the sublimity of your vocation. Be persuaded that we have more merit in working for the salvation of souls, because our life is nothing but a continual holocaust of ourselves, a sacrifice all the greater for being more drawn out. For example, don't you think that your Sisters who will go to some faraway mission among pagans, or those who are about to found a house in London among Protestants, will have as much and even more merit than if, in a single instant, they gave their life for the Faith? You too will have this faith which will inspire you to walk fervently along the ways of God. You must have the faith of Rome, the fervour of the South, the reserve of our German Sisters and the zeal of our English Sisters. Angers must gather all to her heart so that there may always be a model Mother House.

The way of faith is a way of the Cross. A spouse of our Lord who lives by faith will always be contented whatever hardships she suffers or whatever contradiction she meets with in doing the work she has been given; she considers herself happy to have something to offer God - wings of faith bear her upwards in her heart.

*Give me the joy of your help,  
with a spirit of fervour sustain me. (Ps. 50)*

5. For your consolation listen again: "The just man lives by love." Oh, how happy are souls who live by love! It is true they do not live without sorrow, but love is glad to suffer and nothing costs to the one who loves. A soul who ardently loves God no longer runs, she flies along the path of perfection. We must all live by love; fear must never trouble and oppress your hearts. The Good Shepherd does not wish you to serve him in this way. "He who fears is not perfect in love, for love inspires trust, joy and peace, while fear is accompanied by anxiety." How mistaken are they, according to St. Francis de Sales, who make sanctity consist in anything but the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfilment of the Law consists of Love. The saints hold that faith is love that believes, hope is love that waits, adoration is love that worships; prayer love that asks; mercy love that pardons; charity love that sacrifices itself; mortification - martyrdom - love that immolates itself. St. Philip Neri loved our Lord so much that, one day, while he was praying with extraordinary fervour, he felt his breast expanding by the force of the love in his heart. Shortly before she died, St. Teresa of Avila said: "I feel the love of God so strongly within me that it is impossible for me to live under its tremendous pressure."

*Abide in my love. (Jn. 15:9)*

6. If natural love can sometimes produce the most surprising effects what will the supernatural love of God not work in a soul reborn in Him? Two brothers were utterly devoted to each other: one of them went on a short journey. Back at home and not seeing his brother he asked where he was. He was answered by tears and guessed his brother had died. "My brother is dead? I cannot possibly live without him!" Saying this, he died of grief. In the reign of Michael the Paleologue, Emperor of Constantinople, the Turks took two Greek sisters into slavery. As they were sold to different masters they were obliged to separate. What they suffered at their fate cannot be described. When the moment of parting came, so great was their anguish that they both collapsed and died. St. Francis de Sales tells the story of an eagle which was tamed with great care by a young girl. It was accustomed to hunting birds and then bringing its prey to its mistress. One day, while the bird was out hunting the girl died and, as was the custom of that country, they prepared her body to be burnt. The eagle returned and seeing its beloved mistress corpse, it flew on to her with wide spread wings as though to protect her and, in spite of the fiery ordeal, remained motionless to be consumed with her. You see how even animals love their benefactors, so how about us? Mustn't we love God from whom we have received so much good? For proof of our love He only asks observance of His Law.

*Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:18)*

7. We can all love God - the happy as well as those inclined to melancholy; those who are wise as well as those less so; those who are gifted with many talents as well as those with fewer. One day a good lay brother told St. Bonaventure how happy he was to have such a good intellect enabling him more than others to make progress in the art of loving God. St. Bonaventure replied that in this art those less intellectually endowed could easily equal the more learned and even outstrip them! Just then, seeing a group of peasants returning from work, the brother asked the saintly doctor whether these poor people could also love God? Yes, they could! Whereupon the brother began to shout: "Good people, men and women, rejoice because you can love our good God as much as Father Bonaventure who is such a wise Doctor!" and the very thought so moved him that he fell into an ecstasy which lasted three hours. Do everything as far as you can for love and you will see what you are capable of! One can make more progress this way in a year, than in ten by the way of fear.

*Our senses kindle from above,  
And make our hearts o'erflow with love;  
With patience firm and virtue high  
The weakness of our flesh supply . (Liturgy)*

8. Our Institute has chosen the road of love and a Superior who seeks to be feared rather than loved would be wanting in the spirit of our Congregation. I delight in that passage of the Gospel where our Lord addresses the Apostle Peter, who had been unfaithful to him, in these gentle words: "Peter, do you love me?" Peter had offended him, but he does not ask: "Peter, do You fear me?" And at the disciple's last response, seeing how upset he is at these repeated questions which seem to imply a doubt, Jesus, not satisfied with saying twice: "Feed my lambs," adds, "Feed my sheep." So Peter is appointed Pastor of pastors and infallible head of the Church. And here let me remark in passing that Jesus doesn't say to Peter: "Govern, be Master," but uses the word 'Feed'. This means, "prepare pasturage, give food to your lambs and your sheep", indicating that he has given to His Church a law of love not of fear. This law, however, includes the prerogative of authority even for the correction and salutary punishment of the offender; this still exists, but always in love. In the Congregation too, we want to lead you only by love, to point out faults only by love, to have you obey, but only by love. We shall be able to say to our Sisters: "Do this, do that," and they will do it promptly; on every occasion they will respond with great discernment showing that they do everything through love not fear, aware that an active, noble love makes saints. According to Fénelon, "God doesn't wish us merely to do his will, he wants us to do it with love."

## CHAPTER 6

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*"When we fall,  
Jesus holds us lovingly and graciously,  
And swiftly raises us.*

*(Julian of Norwich)*

1. "I am the Good Shepherd; I give my life for my sheep." My dear daughters, during this week we shall reflect together only on the Good Shepherd. This subject will provide us with ample matter for thought, for Jesus the Good Shepherd is the true model whom we must try to imitate in order to measure up to the holiness of our vocation. He is the divine original we must endeavour to reproduce in our conduct. Because he stooped to make us partners in his work and has put us, so to speak, in his place in the sheepfold where he has gathered in so many unfortunate sheep, we must, on our part, be filled with the spirit of our adorable Master and live with his very life. My dear daughters, You will do no good nor have the spirit of our vocation until you have the thoughts and affections of the Good Shepherd, of whom you must be the living images in the midst of your dear flocks. Now, what did Jesus say of himself? "I have come to save the lost." (Matt. 18.11) How did He accomplish that? He followed sinners with a father'- concern and bore much weariness to lead them back to Him. Do you remember His wonderful kindness in welcoming Jerusalem's notorious sinner, Magdalen, when she fell at His feet washing them with her tears? Why do you harass this woman? Stop persecuting her!" (Mk. 14:4) See Him, another time, seated by Jacob's well; He is tired and rests awhile. But He is waiting for a soul, waiting to save the Samaritan woman. Watch Him in Jerusalem: a guilty woman, deserving stoning, is dragged before Him. "Let whoever is without sin throw the first stone." (Jn. 8:7) the crowd slinks away. Gaze at Him after the Resurrection, still the Good Shepherd in search of two sheep who, discouraged and sad, have left Jerusalem, City of Peace, to go to Emmaus, stronghold of confusion. He joins the two disciples who are filled with consternation, their faith reeling; He walks along, going neither too fast nor too slow for them, joins in their conversation, suiting Himself to their weakness, the better to teach them and enlighten the darkness of their minds.

*"His will is that we should be like Him in holiness,  
and never-ending love to ourselves and our neighbour.*

*(Julian of Norwich)*

2. There, my dear daughters, is the example you must follow, for you are called to be so many Good Shepherds, imitating the self-denial, the spirit of charity and zeal of Jesus Himself. Like Him you will go to Emmaus in search of runaway sheep, to surround them with the Good Shepherd's care and lead them back to the fold. A difficult task, but great, noble and divine to the eyes of faith. Never be discouraged at difficulties. God allows us to meet them sometimes to revive our zeal should we be inclined to tepidity. The object of our thoughts, words and actions will be the salvation of our dear sheep, like our Saviour whose thoughts, desires, actions and toil had no other end. Indeed, the wonders he works in our dear girls clearly show how much he longs for their conversion. Be full of zeal, then, to save these souls entrusted to your care. Let that be your life's work. This thought must haunt your prayers to make them more fervent, your Communion to arouse holy love, your daily work, to enkindle in you more and more the fire of love and zeal. Don't forget - one must be holy to work effectively for souls, given totally to God, no longer concerned with self nor with things. Jesus has chosen you, he has made you partners in his Mission to all peoples so that you may bear fruit. But what fruit? Fruits of conversion and salvation! That is the way you will attract abundant blessings and graces.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, kindness,  
gentleness and self-control. (cf. Gal. 5:22-23)*

3. Work to become worthy of your wonderful vocation, by a burning, active and alert zeal and a charity without limits, always keeping the Good Shepherd before you as your model. "You who govern the flock of Israel are just as truly Shepherds," God tells us by one of his prophets. Untiringly strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the wounds of the injured, raise up the fallen, search for the lost ones. Beware of treating them harshly, and ordering them about haughtily. Do remember, dear

daughters, you will never do any good when you correct unkindly. I am far from blaming those who, obliged by certain circumstances, correct strongly and firmly; however, it is by great gentleness that you will gain hearts and minds. Once you have won them, you will be able to do anything with people. You will calm these naturally rough characters, soften them and eventually gain them for God.

*I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep  
and my sheep know me,  
I lay down my life for my sheep. (Jn. 10: 14,16)*

4. It seems that Our Lord had a particular affection for the sweet name of Shepherd: the princes of Israel were called Shepherds, and he chose as his first adorers not only the poor, but poor shepherds. The reason? Their way of treating their flocks expressed better than any other symbolic figure the tenderness and concern of this God who is so loving towards his dear sheep.

How, in fact does a good shepherd act? He who forgets himself, often has to endure hunger and thirst. He is crushed by fatigue and difficulties - no matter! He is happy if his sheep do not suffer and if he finds any who are lost. What trouble he takes to lead his flock to good pastures! In summer he seeks out places where there is water and shade; in winter he leads them to where the cold is less biting and the grass more abundant. If he notices poisonous plants near the little lambs he hastens to pull them up. Day and night he's on guard against wolves - he never completely relaxes.

*The folds that receive many penitents are  
always blessed by God. Don't be afraid  
to deprive yourselves in order to receive them.  
Even if you had only one piece of bread,  
share it with them and be at peace.  
God will take care of you!*

5. Now you can see what to do for our young people, for the children God has entrusted to you. Watch over them carefully, noticing their needs of mind and body and prudently leading them to spiritual pastures suitable to each one's state. This is why it is so essential for you to be imbued with the spirit of the Institute: it will teach you the right way to fulfil a charge of such importance. When grass is lacking in the chosen ground, the shepherd rolls up his tent, asks, if necessary, the help of other shepherds and seeks another site where there is more abundant pasturage even though he, personally, is not so well placed, has to leave his relatives and friends, and go far away. He reckons these inconveniences as nothing, satisfied if his sheep can graze. So, what we see shepherds doing for their flocks shouldn't we do for souls who cost our Lord his precious blood and who, for that very reason, are most dear to us? I must admit that even during my Novitiate the urge to work for the conversion of sinners haunted me so relentlessly that I felt guilty and accused myself of it as a temptation. I often wept at night because I didn't have enough penitents. When

Mgr. Montault sent his delegate to us in Tours to propose the foundation of a house in Angers, my joy was so intense that I thought I was almost in heaven! In those days, a new foundation was so difficult and so rare! Now, however, we are privileged in having our Institute erected into a Generalate, with many blessings from the head of the Church. He wants to see our houses all over the world, so you will pitch your tents from end to end of it. One town, one foundation cannot satisfy your zeal - it must embrace the whole world.

*Go and make disciples of all nations. (Matt. 28:19)*

6. St. Paul said: "I am neither Greek nor Roman, I belong to every country." St. Francis Xavier also said: "I am not only Spanish - I am Indian. Chinese, Japanese; in fact I belong to every region where I preach the Gospel." There, you see, my dear daughters, the right attitude - those are the dispositions which must inspire the Institute. Let us rouse ourselves and go forward! As we are all Shepherds, or if you prefer, Shepherdesses, no one small corner of the earth should hold us back. As for me, I no longer want to be called French! I am Italian, English. German, Spanish, American, African, Indian .... I belong to every country where there are souls to save. Don't be afraid to pitch your tents on distant shores if sheep are there to lead to the fold. sheep from Italy, Bavaria and all Europe; from America. Africa. Asia and Oceania. Bring them all in!

*My sheep listen to my voice...  
and they follow me. (Jn. 10:27)*

7. The more you hasten to answer the call, the greater will be your victory. And here I feel I must give you some important advice. You know that Scripture tells us that the Good Shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to go in search of a single stray; in the same way, let us leave ninety-nine other works to lead back the lost sheep of the house of Israel. By that, I mean that if you cannot open several sections you must give preference to the work for wayward girls and women and our Magdalens. I have noticed that our houses which are satisfied with these two apostolates always do well. Moreover, dear daughters, never found a house for our Magdalens if you haven't a suitable property. They need fresh air and solitude. You will only expose them to dangers and temptations if you put them where there is no garden and inadequate accommodation, where they cannot be quite separate from the other categories. Here in Angers, the centre of the Institute we have a variety of Apostolates because we must form the novices in different kinds of work, but you can see that we have several buildings separated from each other, a very big garden and enough resources for all of them. The different sections have no communication with one another, there is no shortage of Sisters to take charge of them and the grounds are spacious enough for everyone. All this is hard to find in some of our houses, therefore we must always and above all give shelter to those dear souls who, lost in the stormy world, wandering in the midst of its dangers and snares, find it impossible to recover from their falls. If you abandon them to busy yourselves with other apostolates, you will no longer have God's graces and blessings.

*Hold on to what you have so that  
no-one will take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)*

8. Let us recall what our saintly Fr. Eudes said when he urged us to keep our vows to God faithfully, above all the fourth, to labour for the conversion and instruction of souls who have strayed from the right path. "Be sure," said he, "that while you persevere in this holy work, you will be true daughters of the Holy Heart of the Mother of God; she will inundate you with all kinds of blessings. But if for any reason whatsoever you withdraw from this work, you will no longer be called Daughters of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, Mother of Jesus, but Daughters of Belial. Heaven's blessings will be withdrawn and curses will come upon You." These words are frightening yet they are clearly written, they are printed and you may read them in the preface to our Holy Constitutions. But wait! Only Daughters of Mary, or only Daughters of Belial? Isn't a middle course possible? Indeed, no! A middle road is not possible, just as it is not possible to stand upright without wobbling while standing on one leg! We must hold fast to our vocation and the vows we have made, otherwise we shall fall and be lost. Let us aim steadily at the one objective, and not deviate from the Congregation's intentions. In this way we shall populate Paradise with souls, and make sure of it ourselves.

*Do you love me?  
Feed my lambs. (cf. Jn. 21:15)*

9. You would not deviate from the aim of your vocation if, with due permission, you opened a section for young boarders - that has always been allowed from our very beginnings. In fact, you can find in our Book of Customs, a little rule of life drawn up just for them. Even so, you must be sure that you can fulfil your obligations in such away that the care given to the boarders would not, in any way, be prejudicial to the attention given to the penitents. If this were the case, you would have to give up boarders.

With regard to the 'preservation' sections and orphanages, I urge you to read the words of the Sovereign Pontiff in the brief of erection of our Generalate. So, my dear daughters, as we have already said, your orphans and boarders, if you have any, will be as it were, the lambs of your flocks. Bring them up with great tenderness and charity, sacrifice your lives for the whole flock. But I must again point out that if the number of Sisters is limited, or if the premises cannot be adapted, you should keep to a penitent's section only. In that way you will go straight to the point of our vocation. Above all, take care not to become involved in works foreign to our Institute. We have quite enough obligations and must not undertake any that do not concern us. Would you think of undertaking



shelters, hospitals and such works to which we are not called? And do you imagine that by doing so you would benefit your houses? No, not at all! It is true that we are poor and have many needs, but a wonderful and miraculous Providence watches over us. Don't worry, dear children, go on taking care of our Divine Shepherd's sheep and lambs with zeal and love and try to have him faithfully served by others. Be sure that in acting thus, He will never allow you to want for food. As our Father, he will see to all your needs.

## CHAPTER 7

### ON OUR VOCATION - HOW WE SHOULD LOVE IT

#### *Commitment - Zeal - Work.*

1. You work hard, my dear daughters - that is one of the reasons why God blesses you. Your love for our girls and our young children, your vigils and worries take the place of austerities and long prayers. You must never try to copy, for example, the saintly Carmelites whom I love so much, with regard to mortifications and meditations. If I heard that one of you wished to introduce practices proper to Contemplative Orders into our monasteries, I couldn't resist correcting her and pointing out that she had not grasped the spirit of our vocation.

So it is essential that you thoroughly understand the spirit and worth of our Institute. Your motto must be, "Commitment, Zeal and Work." With that you can succeed in founding houses, and you will, indeed, found many - more than we have opened so far - without your poverty proving an obstacle. When and how I cannot say, but it is certain that those new houses must be the fruit of our efforts, privations and sacrifices. By those means you will found flourishing apostolates in England, Germany and elsewhere. I also have Switzerland in my heart; yes, the Good Shepherd must go there. We shall certainly meet with persecutions, humiliations, contradictions, work and poverty, but we can draw comfort from the thought that, in exchange, we shall win souls. We must bring light and conversion there.(1)

The good Bishop of Geneva wants us in his diocese, but he dare not invite us because he has neither house nor funds to offer us. Many other bishops, as poor as he, pray for us and remind us of our Lord's words: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all the rest shall be added to you." (Matt. 6:33) He has blessed you, this venerated Bishop of Geneva, he has blessed our Institute, because in order to spare him the expense of long journeys for the girls he sends us, we have offered all our houses near Switzerland for them. The Archbishop of Dublin has also prayed for us in gratitude for being able to send to our London house several young persons whom we hope to bring back to the Faith and right conduct. You will go to Louisville where a saintly Bishop(2) is calling for You, and praying God that you will not let him die without having welcomed you to his diocese. He, too, is poor and has nothing to offer except souls to save.

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1. These words were said in 1842.
  2. Monsignor Flaget.

#### *Renew yourselves!*

2. St. Paul used to urge the faithful of his day to renew themselves in their calling. I repeat his words to you: let us renew ourselves in our vocation, in the love and spirit of our calling. We shall never love it enough, so beautiful is it in the eyes of God and even of men. It is not always our busyness about our works or the good reputation of our works which give proof of our love for our vocation. If we know how to live in solitude, silence and suffering, when obedience asks this, we shall show more love for our fourth vow than if we were working in the sections. A Sister who would say: "I feel drawn towards this or that - there would be less trouble, fewer difficulties," Oh, that would not express a true love for souls! So, go forward, my dear daughters, in spite of battles, struggles against self love, despite hindrances of every kind, go where Obedience sends you to save souls shackled in the darkness of error, and save them by love.

*Let your light shine before men,  
that they may see your good deeds  
and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:16)*

3. And what should I say of a Religious who didn't understand the sublimity of her vocation, who didn't love it and lacked its spirit? I must admit I couldn't find words to describe her. It would need only

one or two such Sisters to injure a whole community, to cause it to lose its good name. And don't we all know how important it is to preserve intact a community's reputation so as to place no obstacle to the doing of good? St. Teresa, mistress of humility, said that the loss of reputation was the most grievous wrong one could suffer; once a community's good name is tarnished by the behaviour of a few sisters with no esteem for their vocation, people outside easily suppose that everyone in the community is blameworthy. On the same subject, I find the opinion of a certain Religious Superior quite right. He told me to send away unhesitatingly and before nightfall a novice who makes light of her vocation and evinces no interest in the Institute's special apostolate. On the contrary, we must never refuse a subject when we see in her ability, virtue and zeal for the salvation of souls. With these qualities, even if a person had nothing in this world, not even enough to pay the bridge-toll, I should receive her there and then. Whenever we told M. de Neuville that there was a postulant without means, he would ask, "Has she the necessary qualities? Do you know whether she loves her vocation?" If the answer were "Yes," he immediately sent her dowry.

*How shall I repay the Lord  
for His goodness to me? (Ps. 118:12)*

4. I have a great devotion to saints who are out standing for the love of their vocation: to St. Francis Borgia, St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa, who delighted in frequently renewing their vows and recalled with deep joy and gratitude the beautiful day of their holy Profession.

One of the wisest theologians defines the difference between a Religious who loves her vocation, who upholds it and makes it esteemed, and another who has no love for it and who, by her conduct, tarnishes the beauty of the house of God. "One is a slave," he declares, "and the other is a queen! One could be compared to the sun and the other to the moon." What a forceful comparison! I can affirm that among our first Sisters love of their vocation was carried to the highest degree. Their keenest pleasure was to study the rule, the observances, to discuss the Missions, to sing to Our Lady, to obey at the first sign. Father Barthes S. J., sometimes a witness of this religious spirit, was filled with profound joy. How miserable, then, would I be if we had here Sisters who were slack, indifferent, of the type whom nothing pleases, without affection, and, so to speak, pillars of salt! Such people do not spurn earthly things and think very little about heavenly ones. This kind of tepidity is one of the hardest failings to correct, and one must admit that those infected by it are always beaten in spiritual combat.

*In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge. (Ps. 71)*

5. During the 1793 revolution, there were, unfortunately, sad examples of these as, on the contrary, one could see what fervent and courageous religious were capable of. One day, soldiers went to a monastery to seize it and imprison the Sisters. They were at prayer in the choir. The soldiers ordered the Superior to send them out. "It isn't time yet," she answered calmly. "meditation will be over in thirteen minutes." Stupefied, the brutal and high-handed men waited. All the communities in the town were brought to one house where these saintly Sisters kept to their religious exercises in preparation for their inevitable death. When it was time for recreation they spent it joyously, and when the sign to remember the presence of God was given, they instantly fell silent, raising their hearts to God to offer Him the sacrifice of their lives. The guards, moved by such goodness, procured them the means to go to confession and, although the authorities forbade it, they brought in some alleviation for the sick. What heroism this dreadful period witnessed! Almost all the Religious preferred to suffer imprisonment, exile or beheading rather than be unfaithful to their vows. In their situation would we act like these great souls? It is true that we must hope for the grace we need in the time of trial, but can we believe that our Lord would grant this indispensable grace to a tepid and indifferent religious with no love for her calling? Something to make us reflect ... and tremble! Let us love our vocation, love it in spite of all the difficulties and sufferings we might have to bear. May neither fire nor sword ever make us unfaithful to our vows. We must fill our souls to the brim with the spirit of the Institute, always be united among ourselves and, should we ever have to face such terrible circumstances, the Lord will help us to suffer and die. Even though there were only eight fervent religious left on earth, they would be enough to ensure a new seed time and fresh flowering of the Congregation!

*When I am weak then I am strong. (2Cor. 12: 10)*

6. Oh, how thorny and painful our mission is! But never be discouraged if God does not allow it to succeed. The Apostle, St. James converted only a handful of people in Spain. Depraved souls are hard to convert, and often when a good harvest seems to promise it turns out to be ruined. Don't be afraid of people who will come to you and say: "What are you doing? Here we are in the midst of a persecution - they will kill you!" Like St. Basil answer: "So much the better! You will shorten my exile; a Good Shepherd Sister is not afraid of death." Moreover, be prepared to suffer wherever you go. The devil is furious against us because we wrest souls from hell. Nevertheless you can see that if we always have crosses, we also have graces; I venture to say that the graces outweigh the crosses. Whatever the efforts of hell, God will always triumph. Our Institute is not man's work; it is a divine work and the designs of Providence will infallibly be accomplished. Our vocation demands humility and self-denial. Each one must consider herself the least in the Community. That's how we draw souls to God. Our works should be marked with the sign of the Cross; without it they would neither be Catholic nor Apostolic. I couldn't begin to describe the anguish and troubles of some of our houses which seem the most flourishing. M. Olier used to say, "Remember that if the Lord loves you he will humiliate you because, as a rule, he humbles all the more the workman it pleases him to choose for a work founded in his name." So we must love to be humbled and, what is more, we must love our abjection.

*God is love: His is the care! (P. Dearman)*

7. Today at recreation we spoke about the Institute of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart and we commented on the difference between this holy Society - which I venerate - and our little Congregation. The aim of these religious is, not only to provide a fine education but to form young ladies to be devout and innocent. This obliges the Sisters to deal with fashionable people and to have somewhat luxurious establishments although they themselves live very poorly. Our particular aim is to attract repentant sinners, to take, if possible, all who ask admittance, and to refuse no-one however poor she may be. It can be said in all truth that there is a quite special Providence for Good Shepherd Houses. Often they seem destitute but they have never lacked what is necessary; one way or another God has always come to their aid. We see this by the yearly community letters. To give you an example in our house at Metz. The bad drought had put up the price of vegetables and indeed of all food. The Superior had bought provisions for a few days with the little money she had. The poverty of that house was such that there was no money to pay even the postage on a letter from Angers. In this extremity the Superior flung herself at Our Lady's feet and, confident in her power, she made up her mind to try and borrow a thousand francs. A letter was written to that effect and, just as she was about to sign it, someone came to the parlour asking to see the Superior - a person who gave her five hundred francs. On the evening of the same day somebody else came, bringing her another five hundred francs. Finally, the next day, M. Chalondon, vicar for Religious, came, to visit the Community and he too gave five hundred francs, which had been entrusted to him for the convent. Of course the letter asking for a loan was torn up! Dear children, a thousand times our Lord has deigned to come to our help in our need in similar ways.

## CHAPTER 8

### ON HOLY COMMUNION: "COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY."

*"Master, where dwellest thou?"*

*"Come and see!" (Jn. 1:38)*

1. Nobody knows better than we who have the happiness of living the Religious Life, the truth of these wonderful words spoken by our Divine Saviour: "Come to me all you who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest.'" (Matt. 11:25) It is above all when we go to Holy Communion that we experience the consoling truth contained in these encouraging words. It is in that holy mystery that the soul finds the strength and courage so much needed on life's road. It can truly be said that our Saviour's gentle invitation to come to Him refers to the Table of heavenly delights to which, by the kindness of God, we are so often called. Moreover, we receive our Lord's invitation not only to the sacred banquet, but also to adore before the altar, to go to prayer, to the office and to confession. He calls us during our work, giving us a special sense of His presence when we are tired in order to encourage and help us; in a word, puts new life into us. Each time we feel drawn to turn to Him, He is there, ready with His helping grace, ready to strengthen and bless us. Isn't it true that when you are overwhelmed, when you feel alone, our Saviour says: "Come to me, and I will comfort you?" You go to Him and there your soul is calmed and at peace.

*Jesus - true God and true Man!*

2. But it is only about Holy Communion that I wish to speak today, because it is undoubtedly there that we find God and glory in His divine presence. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Some people say, 'I would like to have had the grace of seeing our Lord in His body, as did those who had the happiness of talking with Him when He was on earth. How ravishing to see His face, His demeanour, what He wore, right down to His sandals!' And I tell you that it is the same God who allows us not only to see Him, but to touch Him and to receive Him within us." God could do no more for us, and we could want nothing more. All the same, do we know how to benefit by so much grace? Let us examine ourselves on this. When our Lord was on earth, it sufficed for a person to touch His garment and He was healed of any infirmity. We, for many years, have had intimate contacts with him: we haven't merely touched His cloak, we have often pressed Him to our hearts. He is united so closely to us that, as he says, we are one with Him; and yet we are not cured of our spiritual ills. We receive within us Jesus, who is the Light of the world, the God of power and strength, yet we often remain in spiritual darkness, and we are as weak as ever. We receive within us this God, whose heart is a furnace of love, and our hearts are still as cold as ice. What causes this strange state of affairs? I will tell you. It is caused by our hidden attachment to our faults, by our almost unrecognised love of ourselves, of certain weaknesses and certain imperfections. That is why our prayers and communions are not fervent, and why we are so pitiable and so full of faults. Get rid of everything in your soul which could be displeasing to the eyes of your Beloved and you will experience grace flowing abundantly upon you; You will see more clearly your inmost self, and little by little you will be transformed.

*Jesus - I trust you!*

3. Above all, my dear daughters, if you want to draw a treasury of grace from your closest relationships with our Lord, see to it that you go to Holy Communion with great confidence, joined to a conviction of your own unworthiness and need, conscious that you lack everything. Draw near to our Lord, thoroughly convinced of your nothingness, your destitution, and you will have everything to hope for and to expect from His kindness and mercy. Never forget that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is not less powerful or less generous than He was as a man, conversing with other men.

*Jesus - our Healer!*

4. Scripture tells us, "He went about doing good." Every step of our adorable Saviour was marked by some wonderful act of charity. The lepers in the Gospel had only to say with faith and humility, "Lord, if you will, you can heal me," (Mt. 8:2) and his leprosy was instantly cured. He didn't say long prayers. One word from this unfortunate man was enough to rouse our Lord's compassion.

"Lord, if you will you can make me clean" and immediately his leprosy was cured. So how confident we should be when we have the high honour of possessing within us this divine Doctor of souls, this Master of every good. Oh, in that moment, speak to Him of your poverty, your sickness. Ask Him to heal you. "The just sin often." (Pr. 24: ) according to the sage. So what must it be for us, so weak and fickle in doing good? Our imperfections, our everyday faults cause a kind of leprosy in our souls, and that is why we have constant need to turn to our Lord to be healed and purified. Never be afraid of going to Him - He himself invites you.

*Jesus - our Peace!*

5. He is the God of all consolation and He loves it when we have total trust in His divine goodness. Oh yes, dear daughters, love Holy Communion very much. I know you long for it, that you hunger and thirst for it, and you have every reason to, because you will find strength, courage and light at the Holy Table. Holy Communion will always be the peace, the consolation and life of your souls. As you have the happiness to go so often to this divine banquet, be sure that it is love which leads you there. Every time you come, prepare carefully and with great purity of conscience, because if it is true, generally speaking, that one's first Communion influences a person's entire life, it is also true that the progress of a Religious depends above all on her Communions.

*Jesus - Mercy!*

6. I am speaking of progress in virtue, assuming that she brings the necessary dispositions to this action; but what would happen if she brought only coldness, carelessness and aversion? "A religious who at each Communion takes one more step forward in holiness does not eat her bread idly," says Rodriguez, "and neither does she eat in vain because she benefits so much from it. But" he adds, "woe to you who for so many years have been fed on this heavenly bread but who ate it in idleness, without denying yourself in anything, without overcoming yourself, without correcting a single fault, because you took this food quite uselessly and to your own detriment. May this not happen in the future!" I can't tell you, my dear daughters, how upset I would be if I knew there were Sisters who approached the altar without love and fervour, merely through habit or for some human motive.

The bad example of a Sister lacking in submission to her superiors would scarcely fit her to receive the Bread of Life, the heavenly wheat of our Lord's pure body, who Himself comes on to the altar by obedience, whose whole life was an act of obedience and who was obedient even to death, as St. Paul says, death on a Cross.

*Jesus - our Purity!*

7. Don't neglect your prayer before Mass, nor come late when prayer has already begun.

Oh, I could never stop urging you to come to the Holy Table with a well-prepared heart. Keep strict watch on yourselves; be obedient, devout and loving. Be careful not to soil your soul by wilful faults, for as St. Thomas says, "A vase destined to hold something very Pure must itself be without stain." At the same time, never miss Holy Communion on account of the dryness you may feel. A single Communion missed by our own fault will deprive us of many graces and could well extend our purgatory. Those who go regularly and prepare with care usually become very holy: those who absent themselves nearly always lead a tepid and stagnant spiritual life. I am happy to say that I see in each of you a willingness to correct your faults. By God's grace, none of you is giving bad example, and the Rule is faithfully observed. While this continues, be sure, dear daughters, that you will be habitually in the right dispositions to receive Holy Communion.

*Jesus - our strength!*

8. Père Judde says, "Communion is a powerful means of overcoming tepidity when one is tepid in good faith - meaning that one would wish to be otherwise, and that it is just our innate spiritual wretchedness." Beloved daughters, I will repeat what I have said several times: "Holy Communion must be our food, our consolation and our one desire. The Sister who abstains withers, she becomes feeble, loses the zeal which is an integral part of her vocation, and ends up neglecting her most serious obligations."

Two things prevent us from going to Communion: cowardice and a false conscience. Often, believing that one is abstaining from Communion from motives of humility, or feeling that one should have a longer preparation, the under-lying reason is lack of courage to conquer ourselves, and to control certain tendencies which really should be resisted and destroyed. Have you never noticed that when you have decided against receiving Holy Communion because of your so-called unworthiness, you do not bother much about neglecting certain things that seem important? For example, you will more easily chat in the time of silence, you will not make your prayer with the usual fervour, and you will commit quite a few infidelities with regard to your actions. Be convinced that, generally speaking, this tendency to go less often to Holy Communion is a trap of the evil one.

"Take care," says St. Cyril, "that the demon does not wickedly fill you with scruples, to deprive you of this grace which is the fountain of life and holiness. I implore you do not give up participating in the Eucharist which will preserve you not only from death, but also from all sorts of failings. Our Lord comes into us to strengthen our filial devotion, heal our wounds and raise us up after all our falls."

#### *Jesus - our Light!*

9. Understand that Satan, our cruel enemy, takes pleasure in insidiously giving us a false conscience to disturb our heart's peace, and sometimes he even succeeds in making us believe that we are sinning all the time. So deluded, we deprive ourselves of the happiness of sharing the Eucharistic banquet, and lose the precious graces which the Lord every time offers to souls who approach Him. Be careful never to become a plaything of the spirit of darkness. I am quite sure that by God's special grace none of you is culpable of mortal sin.

#### *Jesus - Power of my power!*

10. This Divine Sacrament is the joy, the glory and the support of every faithful soul, and above all for a Religious of the Good Shepherd. Living on this earth so full of thorns, and surrounded by all kinds of difficulties, what would become of us without the great good fortune of possessing this treasure of Holy Communion? Without speaking of many other things, we often experience enormous suffering when it comes to founding new houses. Oh, what problems! What opposition! And sometimes we have scarcely begun a work when it comes up against such obstacles as could ruin it. In those circumstances, who cannot see how much need we have to turn to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to our strong and all-powerful God who alone can demolish all hindrances?

#### *Jesus - Bread of Angels!*

11. A Sister who is burdened in darkness, in dryness, must go to Communion. A sister who is enjoying spiritual lights and God's consolations must go to Communion, so that His Love may grow in her. Anyone who feels her spirit flagging must go to Communion so that she may sense the strength of the Holy Spirit in her heart. Even holy Religious must approach this Divine Sacrament in order to maintain their fervour and make more and more progress. Sisters full of imperfections must go to Communion to arrive at the holiness they still lack. Cardinal de Lugo says: "The Holy Eucharist is called the Bread of Angels, not because it is food for the angels, but because when souls nourish themselves on it as they should they become angelic." If it is right that you should not have a false conscience, it is also right that you should have a delicate conscience. We have just said that Religious who miss communions by their own fault will probably, for that reason, suffer in purgatory. I must add that those who because of their bad temper make others commit faults and so miss their Communions will suffer there doubly.

#### *Jesus - our Reconciliation!*

12. You must never give offence to anyone, or utter wounding words. We must help each other kindly in our work, and not refuse to talk to each other for days on end. If that happened, how could one receive Holy Communion with a mind at peace? In the gospels we read, "If before you approach the altar you remember that your brother has something against you, go and be reconciled, and then come back and present your offering." (Matt. 5:23-24) Have a horror of faults against charity, of back-biting and tale-bearing; these do much harm. I've always been afraid of these kind of faults, dreading the evil consequences they may have. Avoid them very carefully.

### *Jesus - our Way!*

13. It is while our Lord remains within us after Holy Communion that we should be most attentive, for that is the time we receive the most graces. So I appeal to you to make your thanksgiving with the greatest fervour. St. John Chrysostom says: "On leaving the Holy Table, you should be as strong as lions." You must become the terror of demons as you think only of Jesus our Master and of the love He bears us. The recollection during the morning prescribed by the Rule must be exactly observed so that each Sister may continue her interior thanksgiving after prayer and Holy Communion; thanksgiving which should be continual. The silence and afternoon devotions should then be a preparation for the next Communion; in a word, the thought of this meeting should be with us continually. Père Rodriguez quotes a great servant of God who said that he didn't know what it was to prepare oneself immediately before Holy Communion; that, for him there was only one preparation -to be always as well prepared as possible. So don't neglect anything that will help you to approach this Sacrament of love worthily.

### *Jesus - our Priest and Victim!*

14. You know what the three following words mean: Eucharist, Host and Communion. Alone, they could be the constant subject of our Meditation. The word 'Eucharist' means thanksgiving - praise - gratitude. It shows us what thoughts should fill our hearts as we go UP to Communion and as we return from it. The word 'Host' means Victim. So when we have the happiness to communicate we receive the Holy Victim, the Body of our Lord offered up for us. The Doctors of the Church tell us that when we receive Jesus, we are united to Him as two pieces of wax melt together, that is what the word 'communion' means - 'union with'.

What a mystery, dear daughters, what grace, what a favour! No, I cannot understand how a religious can live without uniting herself regularly to her divine bridegroom! She should find there her life, her one consolation, rest in her weariness. When things were especially difficult, St. Teresa always increased her Communions. As Mère de Blonay, Superior of the Visitation at Annecy, saw that her approaching death would devastate the sister who would probably succeed her as Superior, she suggested transferring to the latter a legacy left her by St. Francis de Sales. This legacy consisted in making two Holy Communions, above those allowed by the Rule - one on Tuesdays, the other on Saturdays. because, said the saint, when granting this favour, since a Superior has a heavier and more difficult task it is right that she should seek and obtain special help from the Lord. The new Superior accepted the precious legacy and used it all her life.

### *Jesus - My God and my All!*

15. My dear daughters, we have so many big undertakings on hand that we need to be nourished and strengthened by this divine manna. Later on, when you are launched even further into the apostolate, when the Evil One will take up arms more furiously against you - and you must expect that to happen - Holy Communion will be your support; then all the good you do will be done solely in the strength of God within you. Be sure that the more you work for the glory of God and the more you endeavour to accomplish this great aim, so much the more will Hell multiply its onslaughts against you. Ah! it is above all then that you will feel the need to draw near to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. However, I recommend - indeed I beg you - always to do so with great fervour and love.

### *Jesus - not my will but Thine be done!*

16. True though it may be that you should have great need of the Bread of the strong, you must not ask for it with importunity. The best thing is always to cling to what obedience prescribes. I suggest that each of you makes a] l the communions allowed by the Rule. Don't follow the example of the two Carmelites who maintained that they could not live without receiving Holy Communion every day. St. Teresa, informed about this, saw that these poor sisters were suffering from the wiles of self-love, not from an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so she decided it would be a good thing to visit their Convent and cure them of this disorder. The first day she let them go to Communion because it was a Sunday, but when she realised that they were preparing to communicate on the Monday, she pointed out that to do so was not according to the Rule. Then there were endless tears and swoonings! They



would die, the Sisters said, if the divine food was refused them. St. Teresa was unyielding. She saw even more clearly that all this was the effect of their imaginations and a diabolical illusion. Meanwhile, the Religious did not die. The next day, and for several days after, there was the same desire and the same refusal, and the same swoons and tears! Finally however, these poor Sisters, who moreover were well-intentioned, submitted wholly to obedience, recognized their mistake, and in allowing themselves to be guided they were entirely cured of their weaknesses, and followed, like everyone else, the Community customs.

*Oh, bring us to that time and place  
When this Thy dear and veiled face,  
Blissful and glorious shall be seen,  
Ah Jesu! - with no veil between. (O Esca Viatorum)*

17. The Doctors of the Church tell us that the "Holy Eucharist may be considered as the pledge of future glory promised to the saints and destined for all righteous souls. For the faithful soul nourished by the Bread of Heaven this sacrament will entitle her to find grace on Judgment Day and be admitted among the citizens of Heaven."

We urge you, my dear daughters, to ask our Lord often for the grace to receive Him in Communion at life's end. Whenever I see our sick Sisters receive Holy Viaticum, their provision for the last journey, and then die, I feel a kind of envy, hoping to have the same good fortune. Oh, what a wonderful grace! How happy those who receive it! One could say that they carry our Lord away with them and make their last journey in His company. Oh, pray that God may grant us all the same favour. Meanwhile, to ensure that we are not unworthy, we must receive this ineffable sacrament with holy fervour. I ardently long that to every one of us may be applied one day these words from Scripture: "How happy the dead who die in the Lord!" That is, how blessed are those who enter Eternity fortified with our Lord's holy Body; "for they shall rest from all their labours." (Rev. 14:13)

## CHAPTER 9

### THE EVE OF CORPUS CHRISTI

*Lauda Sion! sweetly sing  
The praises of thy Shepherd King  
In hymns and canticles divine.*

1. My dear daughters, tomorrow is the feast of Corpus Christi, and although the solemnity is transferred to next Sunday, we must not forget that the Thursday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity is really the day the Church devotes to renewing the memory of the Institution of the adorable Eucharist, because it was on a Thursday that our loving Redeemer gave us this divine Sacrament. I am aware that many of you are unhappy because the feast has been transferred, particularly our Italian and German Sisters. In their countries they have seen it celebrated on the Thursday with the greatest solemnity. It is only in France that it has been deferred to the next Sunday. I must admit, dear daughters, that every year I also feel sad about it. But we must remember that this is done in accordance with a Church ruling and so we must not fret. This resolution is an article of the Concordat. It was granted by necessity to avoid greater evils to our holy religion, at that time a prey to terrible struggles in France. Our holy Mother the Church, who is always guided by the Spirit of God, was accommodating, and thought it wise to agree to this regulation without, for all that, denying the faithful the right to understand that the Thursday is the real feast of the Blessed Sacrament.

*Then be the anthem clear and strong,  
Thy fullest note, thy sweetest song,  
The very music of the heart.*

2. So, tomorrow we shall commemorate it at the office; tomorrow we shall gain the holy indulgences, and I cherish the hope that we shall eventually be allowed to solemnize this great feast in our monasteries on its original date. Of course, it would be a thousand times better to renounce the Thursday celebration than to grumble in a spirit of insubordination against the decision taken by the Church on the matter. Perhaps the Lord, in permitting the transfer of the Feast, wanted to involve all the faithful in celebrating with more pomp, livelier joy and greater dignity the solemnity of the Lord's Day, so adding splendour to the beauty of the Feast. Besides, what day is there that cannot be said to be a feast of the Blessed Sacrament? Already, the sacrifices of the Old Law were a foreshadowing of it. Since the revelation of the Law of Grace, its memorial is daily renewed in the divine sacrifice of the Mass, and it will be renewed even until the consummation of time. St. John Chrysostom said: "All that you find most worthy of veneration, most holy and most solemn in the celebration of any feast, it is the Holy Eucharist, the divine Sacrifice."

*For now shines forth the day sublime  
That brings remembrance of the time  
When Jesus first His table blest.*

3. The Church, who, one could say, was busy the whole year long in celebrating this awesome mystery, had not instituted a special feast in its honour until she did so in the thirteenth century, with the express intention of condemning by a public act of faith, the impiety of heretics who more than ever violently insulted the Sacrament of Love. The Church wanted her children to witness to the whole world what glory and what grace was theirs in really possessing the Body of our Lord Jesus under the mystic veil of the Sacrament; and in doing so, that they should encourage each other to love their Saviour more and more. Furthermore, the Church's purpose was that by means of this outstanding liturgical solemnity, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament would receive public reparation for so much irreverence, so many sins, so much ingratitude and contempt from unbelievers and bad Christians. This is why devout souls, anxious to follow the Church's intentions, make it a duty, and find such great consolation in making frequent visits to the Divine Saviour during this octave. They try to redouble their love towards Him, pray to Him with new fervour, and make sacrifices, wishing to be intercessors with His Heart for all sinners. Oh, my dear daughters, it is above all for us, Religious, to take this to heart and to make up to our Lord for the outrages done to Him in His Sacrament of Love, offering our

fervour, our reparation, our fidelity to the Rule, our Religious spirit, and all the virtues with which our Institute should be adorned.

*Christ willed what He Himself had done  
Should be renewed while time should run  
In memory of His passing hour.*

4. We must get into the habit of grasping the Church's thought as the seasons go by and to unite ourselves to her, above all on big feastsdays. Her true spirit during this solemnity of the Blessed Sacrament is a spirit of joy, of gratitude, of love and of reparation, so we shall celebrate this octave as devoutly as possible. We shall welcome with all solemnity the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament which, on Sunday, will have one of its stations in our Chapel. I would like flowers to be strewn before our Lord, the altar to be adorned with the best we have and your singing to be the expression of your tender love for Jesus. As the sequence says: "Let your praises ring out loudly, and may your hymns and feelings of joy be both sweet and solemn." So, embrace the sense of the Church's words, unite yourselves with her, and endeavour to be fervent religious giving more and more honour to the Blessed Sacrament. One cannot go too far in giving Him adoration, love and the respect which is His due. Try, during these blessed days, to be very recollected. Clothe yourselves in our Lord's spirit, imitate His silence, His sacrifice, His Zeal and His life of Obedience, Poverty and Humility! Make your hour's adoration with the greatest possible devotion. Avoid making the slightest noise, just to please God, and beware of being a distraction to those of your Sisters who feel the need to unite themselves more closely with Him by plunging into the delights of prayer.

*This faith to Christian men is given –  
Bread is made Flesh by words from Heaven,  
Into his Blood the wine is turned.*

5. You love the Congregation's works, and you would like to see them expand quickly; but good though it is to grow quickly, it is even better to grow vigorously. And where shall we find the strength to give our apostolates the necessary vigour? We shall find it at the foot of the altar, asking our Lord for it in the calm of meditation, in the shadow of the Tree of Life. We must seek strength there. The Sisters in charge of the girls, above all, must often return to this source. There are some terrible moments to live through! You must know, my dear daughters, that it is this very strength of the Holy Eucharist which is at the origin of our Institute; that it is thanks to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph that it has developed. In just the same way, it is near our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and in the company of our Lady and St. Joseph that we must seek the courage and the zeal we need to gain souls.

*The living Body is our Food  
Our drink the ever-precious Blood  
In each, one undivided Lord.*

6. But here I feel I must make an observation. We should not normally choose to pray before our Lady's statue rather than before the Blessed Sacrament. This might happen with young novices who, without thinking, could be strongly inclined to this devotion which, in fact, would not please our heavenly Mother at all! Instead, base your devotion to our Lady on the Holy Eucharist. The same applies to St. Joseph and other saints. You should differentiate between a symbol and the reality, and as you no doubt believe it by faith, reflect that the Son of God dwells corporeally and really, true God and true Man, in the Sacrament of the Altar; while on the contrary, Mary, Joseph and other saints are in no way really present in their statues or pictures. It goes without saying, too, as you already know, that the kind of prayer we say to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, asking for his graces as the giver of all good things, is different to the prayers we address to the saints, begging them to intercede for us with God to obtain the graces we desire. Nevertheless, have a great veneration for the representation of saints. By them we feel inspired to invoke their protection, which so pleases God that he has made it known by numberless miracles. Certainly I have no intention of discouraging this holy devotion; on the contrary I want to make it even stronger, by the love for the Blessed Sacrament I am impressing upon you. At the feet of Jesus, whom you must strive to imitate, you will learn the true way of honouring the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, whom you know He honoured so much Himself.

*The good and guilty share therein  
With sure increase of grace or sin,  
Spiritual life or spiritual death!*

7. So, often pray before the statues we have put up as signs of our gratitude for the countless blessings God has granted us through the intercession of our true Superiors, our Mother Mary and of St. Joseph, whom we have now elected as Superior and first administrator of the Congregation. You never honour these wonderful advocates as much as our Lord honours them. So visit their representations frequently, be glad to see them presiding over the Community, and never fail to offer them the homage of your respect and love when you pass them. The sight of a statue or of a holy picture enraptured St. Teresa's heart. She would have liked to see them everywhere. "What better thing or more desirable things could we have to meet our eyes than portraits of those we love so much! Oh, how unfortunate are heretics, who deprive themselves, in their ill-will, of this and so many other consolations." When she travelled, this saint always took a little statue of the Infant Jesus with her, and usually held it in her arms to keep her and her companions in the presence of God. Nevertheless, she said to her daughters: "Take care never to leave our Lord to look at His likeness, above all after Holy Communion, for as you can imagine, if a dear friend came to visit you, it would be utter folly to leave him alone to talk to his portrait."

*Behold the Bread of Angels given  
For pilgrims on their way to heaven:  
The Bread for God's true children meant.*

8. In the Holy Eucharist, our Lord comes to speak with us, to teach us, and really converse intimately with us. Nothing can compare with this happiness, and no consolation could be as precious as being with Him. If we really love our Lord," said Père Saint-Jure, «we shall love everything and everyone that is His and all that He loves." You can never learn more than before the Tabernacle, my beloved daughters. There, our Lord will vary his teaching according to your heart's need; infinitely good, you will find Him always the same towards you. Pray to Him with trust and love, convinced that he, who wants only to do you good, holds the power of God in His hands.

*Come then, Good Shepherd, Bread Divine  
Still show to us thy mercy-sign;  
O feed us still, still keep us Thine*

9. You saw how the dear Superior of our convent at Oran, Mary of the Heart of Mary Bord, burns with zeal for God's glory and the good of souls. You heard her speak of her Mission, and you understood that, in spite of her natural shyness, she rises above herself and overcomes every obstacle, when it is a question of doing good. After having impressed us all, she left yesterday, asking you to pray much for her and for the success of the important business which led to her quick departure. Having taken steps to obtain an audience with Her Majesty, the Empress Eugenic, a telegram informed her that she would be received today at eleven o'clock. Although she was pleased to hear this, our timid Sister was very apprehensive, and I quite understood her agitation. But she took courage in thinking that, perhaps, it would give her a chance to receive some funds for needy souls. She said, "Even if I only obtain a small sum, that would help to feed a few penitents."

This audience perhaps lasted scarcely five minutes, and what is more, be sure she wouldn't be granted a private audience! Behold the great ones of this earth!

*O Thou, the wisest, mightiest, best  
Our present Food, our future Rest,  
Come, make us each Thy chosen guest.*

10. It doesn't need all that to have an audience with our God. At every moment he invites us to visit Him, and we can talk to Him in our hearts as much as we like. So turn to Him constantly. Show Him our needs with complete trust and ask for His Grace. He is an abyss of love, and we shall always find in Him the help we may need, as well as the inexhaustible riches of His consolation. "Let us place our trust in the Lord and we shall never be put to shame." (Apoc. 14:13)

## CHAPTER 10

### BEFORE THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

*How lovely, O Lord is your dwelling place. (Ps. 83)*

1. The Prophet-King was overwhelmed with sufferings, troubles, and sorrow when he wrote the words we shall often repeat during the octave of this Feast: "The sparrow finds a hiding-place and the dove a nest for her brood; your altars, O God of hosts, will be my refuge and the place where I may rest." Don't you agree, my dear daughters, that this is what we should say in the midst of the works we undertake, with the weariness and repugnance we so often feel? Oh, how we need to rest in the Blessed Sacrament to find there strength and courage! The Prophet, persecuted by his enemies, felt deep sadness at being driven far from the Lord's Tabernacle; and he longed ardently to return to the holy place. "My soul," he sang, "is fainting with this burning desire. The sparrow, more fortunate than I, flutters here and there to find somewhere safe to rest. The dove, too, after wheeling to and fro, then chooses a place to build her nest; and I, O my God, I die with longing to come to your house, the only place where I hope I may one day be allowed to find refuge and peace." (Ps. 83)

*Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere (Ps. 73)*

2. When David was praying thus, my dear daughters, there was only one tabernacle on earth, in Jerusalem, and how could it be compared to the hundreds of Tabernacles we now possess? What, in fact, was in it? The Ark of the Covenant containing the tables of the Law given to Moses, a little of the Manna fallen in the desert, and Aaron's rod which had flowered miraculously. How different from our Tabernacles, true dwelling places of our God-on-earth! Here it is no longer the symbol but the reality. How souls must be filled with happiness when we can go and kneel before the thrice holy Lord who is pleased to dwell so near us, and when we have the unbelievable privilege of receiving our loving God within us, isn't it true that our hearts become so many living sanctuaries? What splendid temples are raised in our chapel as we all go to Holy Communion! Think, dear Sister: at that moment our Lord owns more than three hundred Tabernacles. Legions of angels hover round us and join their adoration to ours. We are quite incapable of understanding what is happening during those precious moments. Oh, I do ask all of you never to miss receiving Communion from despondency or tepidity. While our Lord is flooding your Sisters hearts with His sweetest graces, would you willingly become more feeble, far from Him? To show ingratitude, or even indifference, towards Him would be a grave fault for us.

*Don't be afraid: fear locks out love (Anon)*

3. There are also some people who feel excessive fear when they approach the Holy Table. This exaggerated fear does not please God, who would much rather we went to Him with joy and fullest trust in His boundless love. The devil, upsetting us and terrifying us in this way, would like us to deprive ourselves of the precious graces awaiting us in this sacrament of Love. You must beware of him, my dear daughters, and remember the words of the Apostle St. Paul, "Clothe yourselves with the armour of Jesus Christ, so that you may avoid the snares of the spirit of evil." (Eph. 6:13) Listen to the advice of a wise theologian: "Don't be afraid as you come to the sweetest and most comforting of mysteries, because fear locks out love. Don't fear God as though He were wicked and cruel: don't imagine Him with thunderbolts ever in hand! The Eucharist is the sweetest means of linking our souls with Him."

*Come to me all who are weak  
and heavily burdened. (Matt. 11:28)*

4. Souls of good will, who communicate faithfully, usually become saints. All the same, there are those whom God tries so keenly that, without having willingly committed a single fault, they dare not go to Holy Communion. Then again one sees souls who are so weak, or so suffering, that Holy Communion alone can sustain them. So one must conclude with St. Paul that, "Those who eat must never despise those who dare not do so, and those who do not eat should not judge those who do." If you have been lax, my dear daughters, re-animate your fervour near the Blessed Sacrament. Beg our all-merciful God to lift and strengthen your soul. Come into His presence with a sense of your innate

misery and with a burning desire to be healed of all your spiritual failings. Didn't our Lord Himself say: "Come to me all you who are weak and heavily burdened and I will comfort you." (Matt. 11:28) After such an invitation who could refuse to yield to His love? Besides, we all have so much to say to Him, so many secrets to tell Him! So, let's go to Him trustfully, tell Him about our hopes, our resolutions, our longings, find in Him the strength we shall need in time% of trial. He will secretly invigorate us and pour Out On us graces ever new and more abundant. What He asks in return is our personal homage of love and gratitude, so give Him this homage by a total commitment and a constancy full of faith in fulfilling our promises. I think that with the three wings of love of the Blessed Sacrament, kindness, and obedience, one may fly along the path of perfection.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

*The Blessed Sacrament is our Treasure.*

1. The most precious moment of the year has come, my dear daughters, the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, the feast of feasts, which sums up and commemorates all other feasts and solemnities. The Eucharist is the dearest and most comforting of memorials, the holiest pledge of the merciful goodness and incomprehensible love of our adorable saviour. It is from this sacrament that we draw light, strength and life for our souls. It is the Church's true treasure; for all of us, it is our treasure. If the Holy Eucharist were taken from us, our souls would lose their vigour; we should faint and die. Yes the Blessed Sacrament is our life. It is a river of love. I find nothing more beautiful than Psalm 83 where the Prophet King cries out: "How lovely are your tabernacles, O my God! One day in your house is worth more than a thousand others elsewhere." Yes, indeed, my dear daughters, the soul finds these hours before the Tabernacle very sweet! These are the most precious moments in our lives. There are found the true consolation, peace and happiness, impossible to find with any other creatures.

*Listen to Him!*

2. The love we must have for the Blessed Sacrament should be carried to a very high degree. Now, the silence which prays, and which admires the grandeur of a hidden God, is the highest degree of love and admiration. So the soul must be entirely in retreat, above all during the octave; must keep interior and exterior silence, listen to the voice of the Beloved, make reparation to Him, seek to please only Him and long for His love alone.

*Enter into the mind of the Church.*

3. In our Institute there are three Cenacles: the CHURCH, in which we find all our observances, our liturgy, our strength; HOLY COMMUNION, the soul's union with God by receiving the Holy Eucharist; and our VOCATION, the study of our vows and our duties. There you see three great focal points of prayer. All three are inter-linked, and the point of union is the Spirit of the Church. Always act according to it; enter into the mind of the Church.

So, during these holy days be recollected. Be filled with love and gratitude towards our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Constantly think about His extraordinary tenderness for each person, ponder on the priceless gift of Holy Communion, and on the wonderful word, addressed to each one of us: "Come to me, all you who are weak and suffering, and I will comfort you."

*Abide with me!*

4. Often, our divine Saviour has let it be known how much He wanted to be honoured and visited in the Blessed Sacrament to satisfy the longing He has to bless us, to overwhelm us with His gifts. Listen to what He said to St. Gertrude: "My delight is to be with the children of men, and that is why I have instituted the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar to help them." One day St. Teresa was praying when He appeared, and showing her a treasury of graces He said: "See, my daughter, the graces men deprive themselves of by keeping away from me." When this saint went into her monastery of St. Joseph in Avila, she was filled with inexpressible consolation, because the Sisters had such an extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. One of their greatest pleasures was to go, with permission, and work in the ante-choir in order to be nearer their spouse. Because of your many commitments you cannot go to meditate and work in the ante choir staying happily and in peace near your God; but you, dear daughters, must also concentrate with all your hearts on loving, honouring and imitating our Lord. That, precisely, is your principle work if you wish to become holy and, at the same time, help weak souls to be so too.

*This precious pledge of Divine Love*

5. The Blessed Sacrament is the first and supreme object of our worship, but, for your consolation, you must remember that this worship must be principally within your souls. I mean, that we must continually nurture in our hearts a deep attitude of adoration for this precious pledge of divine love. Whether St. Teresa was in choir, in her cell, travelling or immersed in and big undertakings, she was always united to God. Can you imagine that St. Francis Xavier, far away in India, was not constantly in adoration, even though he was usually deprived of the consolation of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? On the contrary, it is told of him that in spite of his numberless occupations, his heart was like a hermit in a cleft rock, always united with God in spirit, finding Him everywhere.

This profound and incessant adoration which we owe to God will make you think of our Mother House and every convent you may be in, as so many temples where "everything that breathes blesses the Lord and praises his works."

*Food for the soul, comfort for the heart...!*

6. In this interior attitude of prayer and zeal for the House of God, you will endeavour to contribute to the holiness of the convent by your devotedness, so that the glory of God may be promoted more and more. In this way, you will perhaps catch an echo of the consoling admission made to us recently by a man of the world: "This work, to which you give yourselves with so much love and zeal, rouses and increases my faith."

St. Teresa says that the Church militant should identify itself with the Church Triumphant: the latter plunges into the essence of the Divinity, the former unites itself with the Blessed Sacrament. It is only by our love for the Holy Eucharist and by the interior life that we can fulfil the vows we have made, and help our Sisters who need help; because, even if we cannot plunge into the battle for our works, at least we can always help by our prayers. That is why I wish I could inspire you with an even stronger love for this adorable Sacrament; why I would like to speak constantly about it to you, for this wonderful Sacrament is food to the soul, comfort for the heart.

*Let us stay close to Him.*

7. Jesus Christ is the only one of all our friends who never abandons us. In our last hour he comes to visit us in our agony. So let us stay closely united to Him by means of prayer and Holy Communion. Let us go before the Tabernacle, not only to mourn for our own sins but still more the sins of those in our care. Any house in the Congregation where there is this comforting devotion, and where there is fidelity to the rule and to charity, is a Paradise on earth. St. Teresa's foundations were very poor, but she was always satisfied, and considered a house well established when she had an altar and the Blessed Sacrament. She let it be known after her death that God has rewarded her much more richly for having increased places on earth for our Lord to rest in, than for all the penances and good works she had done during her lifetime. On a journey, hearing of the death of one of the Order's benefactors, she wept long because she felt anxiety about his salvation. But our Lord appeared to her and told her not to worry, for, although the person concerned had lived as was usual in high society, he received mercy because, by his alms, he had had a church built for the Carmelites. Cultivate a love of the Blessed Sacrament.

8. One night, while in prayer, M. de Neuville, our outstanding benefactor, saw his father, who said, "I am pleased with the church of the Good Shepherd which you have had built." As you know, our Church was built for the repose of his soul.

It is said that St. Teresa is placed in the choir of seraphims, not because of her great austerities, nor for her ecstasies and revelations, but for her great love for our Lord and her zeal in founding monasteries which housed the Blessed Sacrament. What will not be given to the Religious of the Good Shepherd who have already founded many monasteries! No, my dear daughters, not one of you can be lost, unless, alas, she is wilfully unfaithful to grace. When I think to what a degree our Lord loves us, I must say that we are very ungrateful, giving so little in return for so much love. But what consoles me is to think that His mercy is also very great. Let's love Him in gratitude for his goodness, taking to heart the promotion of His glory. In exchange He will overwhelm us with His blessings.



## CHAPTER 12

### THREE INSEPARABLE DEVOTIONS

*Our Lord has blessed our fervour.*

1. Never, my dear daughters, have we seen the month of Mary celebrated with more fervour than this year. Never were the processions made with more love and zeal, and never have our children shown more enthusiasm in doing good. Each day of this beautiful month, ten of our penitents have been to Holy Communion, the Magdalens have made retreats, and acts of reparation. Our Lord has blessed the fervour of the Congregation by sending Postulants, we need them so much.

*Mary's help will never fail us.*

2. Certainly, one cannot have too much devotion to the Blessed Virgin, one cannot love her too much! Her help will never fail us and our Lord is infinitely pleased to receive our humble prayers by the hands of our good mother. St. Bernard assures us that a real servant of Mary cannot perish. However, dear daughters, you are too well instructed for any need to tell you that the homage given to Mary must not surpass or even equal what we owe to her Son, King of Heaven and earth. Nevertheless, devotion to our Lord and devotion to Mary are closely linked. The more one loves Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the more one loves the Blessed Virgin, and the more one loves Mary, the more one loves the Blessed Sacrament.

*He is always there, waiting...*

3. To speak of the Blessed Sacrament is to speak of all that is most holy. It is our life, our love, the principal object of our adoration. It is our comfort and our treasure. Often, when we have troubles and difficulties, men turn away, abandon us, leaving us to cope as best we can. Sometimes they even fling reproaches at us, just when we are already overwhelmed with crosses of all kinds. But Jesus hidden in the Tabernacle never abandons us. He is always there, waiting and ready to help us. Haven't you noticed how, when creatures fail us, our love for the Blessed Sacrament increases; and haven't you felt then how the soul experiences an indescribable happiness, as though God wishes to teach it to love the Cross, in order to taste these consolations, and make it understand that, in the Cross alone, virtue is perfected.

*We enjoy His presence and abide with Him  
under the same roof.*

4. The Blessed Sacrament is, as it were, the river on which the ship of the Institute sails. Without this Holy Sacrament, our little ship could never have made such a quick passage. We undertook it by the inspiration of our Adorable Saviour. He is our pilot, and in his company we advance to the conquest of sanctity. With the Prophet King I can say: "Happy she whom the Lord has chosen and taken into His service, because she will dwell in His temple." Oh yes, my dear daughters, you must love this blessed house, because in it you are happy to possess the God of your hearts. You live under His gaze, you rest under His protection. You enjoy His presence, you abide with Him under one roof. It is almost like finding heaven on earth!

*Like the lamp, I would like to be consumed  
by love at our Lord's feet.*

5. St. Clare used to say that she couldn't understand how a Religious could be bored when she had the most Holy Sacrament in her monastery. I must admit that with the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel and a class for Penitents, I feel, even in this life, a foretaste of eternal happiness. Also, I confess that, when I see the little lamp burning steadily before the Blessed Sacrament, I find it hard not to be envious. I would like to be there in its place, to stay there day and night, consumed by love at our Lord's feet. Have you noticed the colour of the oil which feeds the flame and burns away before the Holy of Holies? It is like amber and gold, and so fragrant. In the old monasteries they prepared the oil for the sanctuary lamp with great care. St. Euphrasia had charge of the lamp burning before the Tabernacle; she was a Princess and was given this honour. Also, this lamp inspires so many

thoughts! The flame which gives light, and points heavenwards, symbolizes for me the zeal we should have to enlighten souls who need our guidance, so that they don't stray from the right road; and above all to give light to those who, having strayed, need to be led back to God, and guided along the path of virtue. When I see this feeble flame flickering, I seem to see our doubts, our fears, our weaknesses, our difficulties, which sometimes crush us, and which, without divine help, would make us lose courage.

The oil, which, while feeding the flame, is burned up, also makes me think of the love, the spirit of sacrifice with which we must be filled in order to be ready to be immolated, to give our lives, if necessary, for the salvation of our neighbour.

*How many sanctuary lamps have we  
not had the joy of re-lighting!*

6. Oh, how my heart rejoices when a new lamp is fit in a new chapel, or in some ancient monastery buffeted by storms, having been put to profane use for many a year, and which we have been able to restore to its original use! One of my greatest consolations is to have re-lighted the lamp before our Lord in the Abbey of St. Florent. And how many other lamps have we not had the happiness of re-lighting? Isn't it true that you too are delighted about it? I recommend you to be very grateful to God and to re-double your fervour in His service.

*Go trustfully and lay your troubles at His feet.*

7. If ever some days seem to you to be long and sorrowful, hurry to take refuge with Him whose only word and single glance can scatter gloomy clouds and bring joy back to your heart. Go trustfully and lay your troubles at His feet. Speak to Him about your inward bitterness, and into that heart burning with love pour out your soul. Dwell deep in His Divine Heart where you will find indescribable peace, and where you will always be given more than you had ever thought of. "Ask and you will receive," our Lord tells us. It is surely during such days that you may ask! Our Lord makes His treasures available. He is there to listen to you, to anticipate your desires, to foresee your needs. Go to Him with your troubles, your weariness, your disillusionments, your pain, and you will come away consoled and strengthened for what remains of the road you must travel.

*Prayers! Fervour! Obedience!*

8. I told you that the month of May just finished was one of the most beautiful we have ever seen. In fact, all our recommendations have been most faithfully observed, our religious exercises so exactly carried out! Often I felt almost carried away listening to your hymns and those of our dear penitents. I am sure that by your prayers, your fervour and your spirit of obedience you were found worthy, during this month, to obtain great graces for the Institute. I would even dare to say that you have in some way compelled the loving Hearts of Jesus and Mary to grant the graces we desired.

*One must believe to obtain!*

9. Today I finished my letter to Our Lady asking her for new postulants. I wrote: "My dear and most holy Mother send us chosen souls." It was impossible to use any other expression; even had I wished to, I could not have done it. In fact, true callings make chosen souls. One must believe to obtain! So don't say: "I hope we shall have one hundred postulants." Say: "I'm sure we shall have one hundred postulants." Of course, you understand, my dear daughters, that I am speaking of subjects really called by God and capable of helping the Congregation one day. May should be a preparation for the month of June. How many feasts occur this month! - the Ascension, Pentecost, the Most Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart. One feast follows another and each brings joy to the soul - invigorates it and fills it with devout longings. The Feast of the Sacred Heart is especially the feast of love, for love arises in the heart. "Behold this Heart which has loved men so much, and which only longs to be loved," said our Lord to St. Margaret Mary, showing her His Divine Heart. "Behold the source of all good," adds the Church. "Draw water with joy from the Saviour's fountain."

*The Heart of Jesus is our hiding place.*

10. How fitting is this season of recollection and prayer, and how many graces one can obtain, especially the Sisters in charge of the girls! During those holy days, particularly, one sees the conversion of the most hardened sinners, and most serious obstacles melt away. Every day, two Religious will go into retreat, like the dove which hides in the cleft of the rock, safe from the vulture's talons. This hiding place is the Heart of Jesus; the vulture represents the troubles and temptations which attack our souls in droves. Inflamm yourself with love for this adorable Heart. Ask for what you want, remember that here is an inextinguishable furnace of graces. If it were ever given you to see just one ray of this divine fire, the sun we see would fade to nothing, and the hottest of flames would seem like ice. Offer holy violence to our Saviour's most loving and generous Heart, and infallibly you will be heard. You know that, when your habits are no longer white, they are plunged into water to wash them. In the same way plunge your souls into Jesus' Heart as into a spiritual river. They will become pure and without stain.

*Make a little store of your sacrifices...*

11. Our Lord let it be known that, on the day dedicated to celebrating His Sacred Heart, he wanted, particularly, the homage of acts of reparation for sin. Don't forget that, my dear daughters. Make a little store Of your sacrifices and then place them in the blessed sanctuary of His Heart! Those among you who by devout practices have increased adoration to the Sacred Heart, and so have drawn down special blessings on our growing family, shall be regarded as foundresses of our various houses, even though they have never left the Mother House. Our Institute was really the first to offer public worship to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our venerable founder wished us to wear a silver heart as a distinctive mark of our consecration to these loving hearts.

Jesus said: "Behold your Mother."

12. Notice that, where heresy is active, it has first attacked the worship of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It has aimed at initiating its destructive work by closing these two sources of divine grace. And then, what efforts has not Hell made to prevent both the private and public worship devoted souls have wished to offer this Divine Heart! What obstacles raised, how many difficulties! What mockery and sarcasm from blasphemers and Jansenists! But nothing could prevent the rapid spread of this devotion across the world. It serves to complete and perfect the worship of the Blessed Sacrament, or rather, these two mysteries are so connected that one cannot separate them. Whoever loves and honours Jesus in the Sacrament of His Love cannot help loving and honouring His Heart, which is precisely the seat of the love revealed to us in the most Holy Sacrament.

To sum up: love of the Blessed Sacrament, love of the Heart of Jesus, love of the Blessed Virgin are three inseparable devotions which we must cultivate with ardour, and which will assure the full development of the good works to which we are committed, as well as our eternal happiness.

## CHAPTER 13

### ON PRAYER

*We should give ourselves than others to prayer.*

1. My dear daughters, to have ardent zeal for the salvation of souls you must love prayer very much, and Holy Communion; for where will you find the graces necessary to carry out your mission, except by staying close to the very Author of grace. The more a religious is motivated by the spirit of her vocation, the more she will love to reflect and pray.

Prayer should be our preparation for approaching the Sacrament of Love, and, in turn, we must by this Sacrament enkindle the spirit of prayer in our hearts. And so, through the reception of Holy Communion and fidelity to prayer we shall be blessed with the graces we stand in need of to grow in personal holiness, and to assist those in our care to respond to their call to holiness. Wouldn't it be sad if we, who should give ourselves more than others to prayer, if we, who have such tremendous need to go to the source of grace, should stay aloof because of temptations or anxiety of mind? This, on the contrary, is an additional reason to draw near to God - the God of Peace and consolation.

*Never omit your prayer.*

2. The devil knows how to draw up his troops! He is well aware that a Religious, who does not pray, is too enfeebled to work for souls. That is why he tries to trick us into giving it up. But we mustn't listen to him, nor let ourselves be discouraged by his evil insinuations. So long as our infidelities do not deprive us of our Lord's grace, we must not allow ourselves to be frightened by the uneasiness the enemy likes to provoke in us. Usually, it is only great constancy in prayer that frees us from spiritual troubles and disquiet; it is also this constancy that will gain us heavenly graces.

I urgently recommend you never to omit your prayer when you cannot make it with the Community. The Sisters who are busy in the apostolate must decide on a fixed time and be faithful to it. After, say, twenty five years in the active apostolate you should be able to attest that you never missed your prayer.

*Work to attain the Spirit of Prayer.*

3. I beg you, dear sisters, work hard to develop an interior life - a life hidden with God, a spirit of prayer. In the religious life, above all in our Institute, we desperately need to seek courage and zeal by keeping company with our divine Lord, if we are to gain souls for Him. Perhaps some of you will tell me that they experience great difficulty in the practice of prayer and meditation. No sooner are they in the presence of God than they are beset by a horde of useless and grotesque thoughts, causing them such confusion and discouragement as seem to make prayer impossible. In that case you must consider whether this happens because you do not prepare as you ought for this holy practice, or whether you fail in recollection during the day. You see, one must remember that silent withdrawal from outward distractions makes Prayer easy, and prayer makes inward attention easy. So make a point of keeping strict silence where and when the rule prescribes it.

How can you hope to pray well in the evening if you chatter uselessly all day? When your prayer time is over, take care not to dissipate it. Think how you have been communing with God, and hold your soul in readiness for the next prayerful encounter with Him.

*The Evil One fears our converse with God.*

4. Quite often the apparent difficulty we experience in praying is an illusion from the spirit of darkness, who fears nothing more than this conversation with God. At other times it is our own laziness that is the obstacle. It is extraordinary how we fear effort, especially spiritual effort. Many people would like to pray without having to take the trouble to recollect themselves, without it costing them any self-discipline. Should they come up against the slightest difficulty, they think all is lost and that they will never be able to overcome the stumbling blocks. Nevertheless, my dear daughters,

whatever the difficulties you may encounter, never be downcast, but raise your thoughts and your gaze to God. Put your trust in Him, remembering St. Paul's words: "I can do everything in Him who strengthens me." (*Phil. 4:13*)

*She who prays in her heart is God's beloved.*

5. Always long to pray well, and don't be afraid, for our Divine Master will certainly help you. Confidence in Him is the best way of making rapid progress. If Sometimes you are dumb in His presence, not knowing what to say, is it perhaps because you lack childlike trust in Him? However, you may certainly be silent at prayer. There is no need to say anything. Be quiet and let God speak! Oh, how beautiful is the prayer of a soul who knows how to be silent and listen to God! These words are meant for her: "Do not wake up my beloved!" Every soul who prays in her heart is God's beloved. He speaks to her, He listens to her, He answers her. Every time you go to prayer, think that our Lord is inviting you to come and that He is ready to give you lights and graces to pray well. If you experience dryness or boredom, if you find difficulty in getting your interior faculties to function, perhaps God is trying you. In that case, bear it patiently, staying humbly at His feet and telling Him simply that you want only to please Him. At other times, as I have already said, this spiritual heaviness and trouble could be the result of our insufficient preparation for this holy work. It could come from levity, a habit of inattentiveness, lack of self-denial, or of a certain attachment to creatures which estranges you from God. In that case, apply a prompt remedy to that fault, begging our Lord to give you the strength to remove the obstacles to your union with Him in prayer. Above all, remember that to flee humiliation, the cross and suffering is to flee prayer.

*Ask yourself is your self-love dead?*

6. So when you realise your troubled and painful condition, you should seriously reflect if these spiritual disorders are not pointing to a soul suffering from a hidden wound, and who is not seeking a remedy. I don't mean grave wounds, but certain weaknesses which are, as it were, inherent in our nature. Ask yourself, is your pride really conquered? Is your selflove really dead? Is your wish to be esteemed by others no longer active in you? And your imagination - is it subject to obedience? And are you fulfilling your duties with care and fidelity? Regarding your spiritual exercises, do you do them with attention and in a spirit of faith? Do you still easily commit faults due to thoughtlessness?

Begin this important enquiry by examining yourselves. Turn to the Divine Physician of your souls; beg Him to make you know your own spiritual infirmities and heal you of them. Have a total trust in His power and goodness, and so you will be forearmed against carelessness and tepidity, and able to be united to God by the fervour and interior attention of your prayer.

*No humility, no spirit of prayer!*

7. A soul that is always restless and hindered by a thousand fears can never make progress in the spirit of Prayer. Little by little her understanding becomes spiritually darkened so that grace penetrates with difficulty, and she stays as though only half-alive and Powerless to make progress in holiness.

Remember, also, that where there is no humility there is no spirit of prayer. Pride distances us from God. "The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds; the Lord rejects that of the proud." (*Eccles. 35:21*) So if you wish to pray well, shun superficiality and be humble. Here are the two principles that are essential to all of us. The ground of prayer is interior attentiveness to God and humility, just as these two virtues are sustained by prayer.

*"Lord, the more You hide from me,  
the more I will look for you. " (St. Teresa)*

8. St. Teresa says that the Lord does not give favours to a soul unless she strives to be recollected, then humbles herself and is convinced that she is nothing. This great saint, raised to the highest degree of contemplation, possessed profound humility - humility in proportion to the sublime favours given her by God. The light He granted her in prayer made her see her slightest faults in such a way that she was convinced she was piling ingratitude on ingratitude, sin on sin; and she

complained to God that He punished her only with fresh graces. But she too, in fact, was for fifteen years subject to such aridity that she declared it would have been less painful to suffer martyrdom than to recollect herself for prayer. She used to have an hour-glass in front of her to measure the hour. She shook it frequently; time went too slowly! Sometimes she noticed that, instead of praying she had been counting the window panes or studying the tiles on the chapel floor. What was worse, the devil craftily led her to think that she was too great a sinner to engage in contemplative prayer, and that it was quite sufficient for her to say the office and pray vocally. Because of this she sometimes went and hid at the bottom of the garden when the bell rang for meditation, as though hiding from our Lord's presence. Then, what grief she felt at being far from the Beloved of her soul! When at last she spoke of this temptation to her confessor, he made her understand the snare the Evil One set to bring about her undoing. She accepted this good advice and resolved to be faithful until death to the practice of prayer, whatever the cost. In her periods of dryness she often said to God, "Lord the more You hide from my soul the more I will search for You, and the more You flee from me, the more I will run after You." Sometimes she turned to spiritual reading for relief.

*One learns to pray by praying.*

9. That is what you must do, my dear daughters. The more our Lord seems to hide from you, the more you must seek Him with loving persistence, never allowing *yourselves* to be overcome by carelessness or sleep. *Make heartfelt ejaculations*, as the Holy Spirit inspires you. Use the good books you have and the good methods you are taught.

However, experience will teach you that one learns to pray only by praying. When the disciples of St. John of the Cross asked him to teach them prayer, he usually answered in three words: "Go and pray." Myself, I feel like giving the same answer to those who ask me the same question.

*Ask God to teach you how to pray.*

10. Prayer is a private audience granted us by God, where He manifests Himself in order to fill us with His graces. But, believe me, dear daughters, no one can lead you into this intimate communion, no one can teach you this secret relationship of creature and Creator. For your part, ask God insistently to teach you how to commune with Him, and work to become open to this Grace. All day long, prepare by great fidelity to all your duties, and then come to Him, your Saviour, with great simplicity. Listen when He speaks to your heart, asking you to correct such- and-such a fault, or suggesting such-and-such a sacrifice. Ask pardon for your faults, thank Him for His numberless blessings, beg Him for new graces for yourself, your neighbour, for your Sisters in the Missions. Use your understanding, your memory and your will. Above all, rouse your heart to love, gratitude and generosity. In a word, your prayer should be a zealous self- denial, a fervent prayer, as persevering when God leaves you desolate as when He consoles you with spiritual delights; a prayer that one could call 'apostolic', motivated not only by a desire to please and glorify God, but also by an ardent desire to lead everyone to love and serve Him at the cost even of our lives.

*Plunge into the waters of prayer.*

11. The Prophet-King says in one of the psalms, that he flies like an eagle above possessions and honours, because they are only smoke. Which one of you, however little given to prayer she may be, is not convinced of this truth! For what is the good of prayer if it does not persuade us that it is only God to whom we must be attached. The days of the just should be always full. So we must not allow our prayer to be feeble, tepid, loveless and without resolution.

When you are there together at prayer, I seem to see an open spring, water gushing from it on all sides. Your souls will be watered by it in proportion to each one's depth of meditation. Plunge into these waters, draw on them, treasure them, and so rekindle your spirit of holiness and zeal - the hallmarks of your sublime calling from God.

*Prayer is the best way to sanctity.*

12. It is from prayer that we draw courage to bear the humiliations, shame, heartbreaks and sufferings we encounter in doing our duty. If there is any good in us, we must see it as the fruit of prayer from which every grace comes. Without an interior spirit, without prayer, our labours are useless. In fact, one soon sees that they are profitless.

My dear daughters, you will never work efficaciously for souls if you have not first drawn from prayer and silence the lights which are so necessary. Religious filled with the spirit of God obtain more conversions than those who only have great talents and speak eloquently.

Prayer also helps us to acquire good judgment and to make wise decisions. A Good Shepherd Religious, young though she may be, must apply herself carefully to prayer, in order to acquire the qualities and virtues proper to a wise and prudent woman. Even should a young sister have a light, hasty character, if she gives herself to prayer, you will see her become self-controlled, calm, thoughtful and serious. Indeed, prayer is the best way to sanctity. That is why every saint has set out on the road to holiness by giving herself to this exercise of communication with God.

*Our Saviour loves to reveal Himself.*

13. St. Teresa, speaking of prayer, makes a charming comparison. She says that a soul is like a little cultivated field which needs continual watering so that the plants, meaning the virtues, can flourish and Multiply. The soul can then gather the fruits and flowers. Well, you know a field can be watered superficially or thoroughly. But when she has faithfully given herself to prayer, when she refuses nothing to God, as soon as she comes into His Presence, she is quite naturally recollected. Heaven then pours down on her an abundant rain of grace, without any effort on her part. Our Saviour loves to reveal Himself to such souls, as he showed Himself to His happy disciples on Tabor, without shadow or cloud. He shines with brilliant light and fills their hearts with a torrent of love and consolation. He, as it were, leads them up to a mountain, separating them from creatures and lifting them above human affections. There, alone with Him, He lets them feel the sweetness of His Presence and shows them something of His ravishing beauty, so that the time of prayer passes too quickly, and they exclaim with St. Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us make here our dwelling - place."

*The silence of prayer should be  
your favourite occupation.*

14. From where do you think, dear Sisters, did the saints draw the love that fired their hearts? They drank it in, absorbed it in prayer. St. Peter of Alcantara was so ablaze with this divine flame during prayer that once he threw himself into a frozen pond for relief. St. Aloysius Gonzaga's face appeared on fire, and his heart beat so violently that it seemed as if it would burst his rib cage. Like the saints, love to listen to God, and find your delight in conversing with Him in the silence of prayer. It should be your favourite occupation, and then you will be like the tree, of which Scripture speaks, that is always green and bears fruit in due season. Continually watered by grace, the garden of your soul will be radiant, the seeds of good desires will flourish and the fruits of holy virtues will abound. Notice that these fruits are only fruits of wellmade prayer. If you feel a great desire for real holiness, you may hope that your prayer is good. But if you are not advancing in virtue, if you are cowardly or indifferent in doing your duty, there will certainly be some serious defects in your prayer life. In this case, rouse yourselves as soon as possible so as not to become a withered plant incapable of benefitting by the dew of grace. The heart of a religious who does not pray, or who does so superficially is, in the words of Scripture, a leaking cistern which lets the waters of grace escape.

*Like Mary's, your life must be one of Prayer.*

15. You know, my dear daughters, that you must always walk in Mary's footsteps. She is our incomparable model. The Heart of our Holy Mother was a sanctuary, an altar of sacrifice from which the incense of prayer rose without ceasing. She was constantly adoring and thanking God. In the same way your prayer should be habitual. Whatever work you may be doing outwardly, your soul should be busy adoring, thanking, blessing and loving God. Your heart is consecrated to God in a very

special way. This obliges you to reproduce as best you can the beautiful virtues which shone in Mary. Like hers, your life must be one of prayer, hidden in God. In this way you will have the happiness of being her beloved daughters. Her motherly heart will watch over you with great tenderness, and holding your hand, she will guide you through and beyond the gates of death.



## CHAPTER 14

### IN PREPARATION FOR THE ANNUAL RETREAT

*The King has brought me into His inner room (S. of S. 1:4)*

1. As the Apostles, on returning from their mission, gathered round Jesus, He said to them: "Come away to a lonely place and rest a little while." (Mk. 4:31) We could well say the same to you, because you too have worked hard.

One day, St. Teresa, on fire with love for our Lord, did not fear to say: "Lord, I know very well that there are souls who serve you better than I, but what I don't hesitate to assert is that nobody loves you more than I do. I admit that others with more talents speak better of you and do greater works for your glory, yes, but that there is a single person who loves you more than I, no, I will never agree to that!"

We could never dare to speak to our Lord with such liberty, but in another sense, and giving God the glory, we could perhaps claim that among Religious Orders of women it is difficult to find an Institute which works more than ours and undertakes more works of zeal for the glory of God and to save souls. So, "Come and rest a little while."

*Be still before the Lord and  
wait patiently before Him. (Ps. 37:7)*

2. I know you find rest in prayer and holy communion, but there is another very desirable and salutary rest, a retreat.

I notice, dear daughters, that you take care to let your girls savour this pleasant and very necessary rest before thinking about yourselves. By that I see that you are true mothers, led by Faith and Love. Oh, keep these beautiful dispositions; never regret your hard work, bear your weariness a little longer. The time will come when you will be amply repaid!

As you begin this time of rest, I invite you to find new strength in it, and then go back to work reinvigorated. This is what our dear Master wished when He said to His Apostles the words which He addresses to you today: "Come aside into solitude and rest a little while." Notice that He does not say rest for a year, or a month, but "rest a little while." And you too, dear daughters, you will rest for little while to summon up new spiritual energy, because work awaits you.

*He will renew you with His love. (Zeph. 3:17)*

3. During these days, then, be like happy disciples and keep company with our Divine Saviour. Give Him an account of what you have done up to now and tell Him about your plans for the future. If you have been fortunate enough to win some victories, you will lay at His feet the trophies wrested from the enemy. As for your faults, infidelities and miseries, bury them in the depths of His boundless mercy, placing yourself totally in His blessed Heart. Oh, yes, this loving Heart is like a pool into which you plunge to cleanse your stains and be healed of your spiritual infirmities. You know how in the Gospel the sick went to the miraculous pool. They went in sick, and came out cured. They went at the proper time, longing to be healthy. They plunged in, washed and were freed from all disease. And that, my dear daughters, is what should happen to you during the retreat. Our souls' infirmities will disappear, our sins will be forgiven, we shall be inundated with fresh graces, and if we correspond faithfully to God's inspirations we will see the marvels of His goodness in our souls.

*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone. (Ps. 116:7)*

4. The annual retreat is an absolute necessity, pre scribed in our Constitutions. In it we must study in depth the end we are aiming at: the end common to all, as Christians; the particular end as Religious. We must pray about this basic point in our meditations, then see what has delayed us on our road, or remained an obstacle there. Is this obstacle within ourselves? Is it in created things

around us? Where the answer to that question is found, at once apply the remedy. It will be in this area that we make our resolutions.

*Listen! A sower went out to sow his seed. (Mk. 4:3-8)*

5. We have said that a retreat is a rest. Oh yes, as we have seen, it is a time of rest which our divine Master invites us to spend in His company; but it is also true that in this blessed solitude we must busy ourselves in preparing the ground of our souls and in sowing the seeds of holy actions for our own and our neighbour's salvation. And so we can also call it a spiritual work that we undertake every year for the salvation of our souls,

I would like you to really understand this comparison I am making use of, my dear daughters, for then you will grasp what you are meant to do during a retreat and after it.

A field destined for wheat is often full of weeds with more or less long roots. The first thing the farmer does is to pull these up, otherwise the good grain sown will be choked. The weeds are burnt in order to really destroy them, then the ashes serve as a useful fertilizer. Don't you think this is a vivid analogy for what happens at this holy time? Firstly, we uproot the faults which hamper our souls and stifle the growth of holiness: silence, self-denial, obedience, examination of conscience, absolution received after an especially fervent confession, all this will clean up our soul.

Another concern of a good farmer is to change or renew the seeds. Normally, half-ripened seed is not used. Only the best is chosen, obtaining it, if necessary, from another region. In a word, seed should be of good stock and fertile, because, clearly, the good state of the soil and the fine quality of the seed are the two conditions which promise a rich harvest.

*The Kingdom of Heaven is like  
a man who scatters seed on the ground,  
the seed sprouts and grows. (Mk. 4:26)*

6. For us, the good seed means the instructions and meditation which will produce more abundant fruit the better they are understood, savoured and digested, above all if our souls are well-disposed. In the natural order, after the sowing comes the rain, then the warmth to draw out the fruitfulness already deposited in the soil by the creator's power.

In the spiritual order, the Lord's grace gives vigour and fruitfulness, grace which enables our souls to accomplish a strong, deep and ceaseless activity with, however, one condition; without our co-operation the springs of holiness dry up and no virtue comes to fruition within us. This work of nature is renewed each year and even several times a year according to the number of harvests expected. It is just the same in the spiritual life. We make one long retreat and several periods of recollection in the course of the year. Sin sows weeds in our souls. We must constantly and prudently get rid of them, plant good habits, then water, manure, hoe carefully - otherwise the preparatory work will be wasted.

So one sees that the farmer's efforts during the year depend entirely on the way he prepared the soil and the seed during the autumn. By this comparison I mean to encourage you to make the most of your retreat. Allow the good seed to fall on to your heart. But don't stop at that. Remember that you must work at your plot all the year round; then you will be sure to have an abundant harvest at life's end, and after all Your toil you will go to rest with your heavenly Father.

*Be at rest, O my soul,  
for God has been good to you. (Ps. 116:7)*

7. Above all, dear daughters, don't sow confusion in your garden. Choose the seed, the advice, which suits you best and endeavour to cultivate that. A retreat could be compared to a flower-bordered alley - one doesn't pick all the flowers as one goes by, but gathers only a small bunch of the most suitable for one's purpose. A retreat can also be compared to an arsenal where each man goes to select the weapon best suited to his size and strength, ignoring the rest.

If you benefit by a retreat, dearest daughters, the grace of the Sacraments could be even more efficacious. You will be more closely united to Jesus. You will place your resolutions in the safe keeping of His Heart. You will trust and love Him more and be faithful to Him to your last breath. I beg our Lord to give you this grace!

## CHAPTER 15

### EVE OF THE ANNUAL RETREAT

*Make the most of the time God allows us!*

1. "As the deer yearns for running waters" so you are longing for the retreat to invigorate your souls, my dear daughters, which makes me think you will greatly benefit from it. The Lord is pleased to answer the prayers of souls of good will and to see that their holy desires are fulfilled. As for me, I must admit that perhaps I have never felt more strongly than now to urge you to make this retreat with the most perfect dispositions possible - that is, with the dispositions you would wish to have at the moment of death. Perhaps this retreat will be the last for some of you, and even if we could be sure of many years more to live, it would be another motive to determine to make it as well as possible. For you know, dearest Sisters, that if life is prolonged, so is the struggle, that our strength diminishes and we must look ahead for help if we are not to risk being overcome. Besides, whatever the length of this life, it is really only a moment and vanishes like a shadow. We walk with a relentless rhythm which carries us on towards our end at a frightening speed; and we cannot halt the pace by a single second. So let us make haste to make the most of the time God mercifully allows us.

*We know we shall be like Him  
for we shall see him as He is. (1 Jn. 3:2)*

2. Many of your beloved Sisters have already died, and one can but expect that others will do so next year. A retreat is the best preparation for death; that is, when we must think seriously of our end and put our souls in order. God's grace overwhelms us and that is another reason to be fervent and profoundly humble. How appalling if God withdrew from us even for a moment! If He began to settle accounts with us, how much He owed us and how much we owe Him, since the first moment of our lives up to now, where should we be? We shall certainly have to face up to this reckoning one day! Then we shall be alone with Him and our poor actions will be scrutinized in detail.

*.... God's greatness flows around our incompleteness,  
and round our restlessness, His rest. (E. B. Browning)*

3. There are some people who are never satisfied with past confessions and absolutions received. They want to confess all over again. They fear they were not properly understood, had they left something out, that they should have explained such and such a thing, that they were not truly sorry. When a good confessor tells you to be at peace, you must believe him and be at peace. Scruples paralyze the soul and make it miserable. Instead of drawing serenity of soul from the Sacrament, some seem to leave the confessional more disturbed. Your souls, on the contrary, should be filled with joy and gratitude.

*O Jesus ... I beg for an upright heart,  
never found in tortuous paths.  
(St. Thomas Aquinas)*

4. Avoid, dear Sisters, prolonging spiritual direction beyond the point where many faults can steal in. Would you like to know how to be quite at peace about one of the most important acts of your life? Make a habit of being simple, straight, clear and exact. Never speak of others - just about yourself. Be sure never to be guilty of a lack of beautiful charity at the same time as you accuse yourself, in order to obtain God's Pardon for your faults.

St. Chantal, who often gave this advice to her daughters, used to cite the example of a Religious who, having failed in charity in confession, then suffered great remorse. She spoke to her Superior about it but could only recover peace of conscience by retracting her statements in front of the confessor, who had formed a poor opinion of this Sister's community on account of her exaggerated assertions.

### *Recollection and Joy!*

5. The devil is very crafty, dear daughters. He can ensnare you, even in the holiest place, at the most sacred moment. Oh, may that never happen! Try to go to confession as though it were the last of your life and that you were opening the book of your conscience under the eyes of the Lord. At the head of the resolutions you will take during the retreat I would like you to write: "Either conquer myself or die!" I want you to be always cheerful and kind. "Rejoice always" says St. Paul ( Phil. 4:4) Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit which the wicked never experience. Guard this joy of the children of God in your hearts. Go into retreat with recollection and joy, stay there with recollection and joy, and you will go back to your work with recollection and joy. Virtues that are sad, dour, bitter and hard (which of course are not virtues at all) are not inspired by the Spirit of God and are not suitable for a Christian, much less for a Religious of the Good Shepherd.

*Thou, O my Lord, art Light and Life to me. (Anon)*

6. St. Paul says: "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious ... if there is any excellence, anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil. 4:8) And I, for my part, tell you, dear daughters, that you should make your resolutions in the light of St. Paul's teaching. Those who are called to win souls for God must be holy, full of dignity in their behaviour; must be kindly and friendly with everybody. They must be the good odour of Jesus Christ to inspire others with love of virtue. Their conduct should be blameless, their actions worthy of the Master they serve. Don't forget with what strength and simplicity St. Paul sketches the characteristics of true and solid devotion. So religious who really practice virtue win souls much more easily. You should all behave like this, and continue to form yourselves during the retreat. The more you purify your soul, the more you will keep your heart in peace and joy. In this way you will give more honour to God, more inspiration and help to your neighbour, more consolation to my heart and greater lustre to our Congregation.

From the fullness of my heart I call down that holy peace of soul which is the mark of the elect. May this blessed peace reign in you during this life and for all eternity.

"Go, my people, withdraw into your houses,  
close your doors and stay hidden for a little while." (Is. 26:20)

## CHAPTER 16

### BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION

*"Come, my love,  
Set me like a seal on your heart.*

*(Song of Songs)*

1. My dear daughters, you are going into retreat to prepare for the beautiful feast of our Lady's presentation, and the renewal of your holy vows. You will present them to the Blessed Virgin, begging her to protect them and, as it were, making her a trustee. And what do you think Mary will do with them? She will look after them until she presents them to her beloved Son at your judgment, claiming for you a great reward if you have kept them faithfully.

You will accomplish this renewal not with trepidation, remorsefully, but like a good soldier who fearlessly and with a loyal heart, is proud to renew his oath of fidelity made to his King. You, who are soldiers of the Lord, who make up His chosen company, His vanguard, who are like privileged cadets in the Church's army, trained in the shadow of the sanctuary, you will renew the vows of your changeless fidelity with noble courage, in God's presence. Besides this, dear daughters, you are very much more than soldiers of Jesus Christ. You are His chosen spouses who, in order to be more pleasing and more like your divine Spouse, have wished to unite yourselves more closely to Him by the vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Charity. Often say with David: "I shall go into your house, O Lord, with sacrifices and holocausts and before you I shall fulfill the vows I have made." (Ps. 65:7) Your vows are these sacrifices, dear daughters. You must offer them every day to the Lord. Live in such a way that, again like David, you may say: "I took great care to cleanse myself of all attachment to sin."

*I will fulfil my Vows to the Lord  
In the presence of all His people. (Ps. 116:14)*

2. In choosing Poverty, you have not only given up this earth's goods, but even the very desire to have them.

Embracing Chastity, you are committed to leading on earth a life resembling that of the angels.

In vowing Obedience, you have given over your whole will to God, so that it may be no longer yours, but His alone. You determined to imitate this divine Master, particularly in His submission to His Father in the Garden of Olives and on Calvary. You have laid down your liberty at the foot of the altar. Which of you would wish to take it back, this liberty given to God? Who would dare to say: "I am tired of giving my freedom. I repudiate the merit of the sacrifice I once made."

And now think, dearest Sisters, what a sublime sacrifice we made in committing ourselves to the work of saving souls by a fourth vow. This raises us to the dignity of co-operators with the mercy of God. In many religious orders only the three vows are made, but for us they are almost a means to our end: the carrying out of our fourth vow. This vow exacts of us great purity, so that we may be a brilliant light to the souls we lead by the brightness of our virtues. Make a habit of referring everything you do to our fourth vow, for it is that vow that protects us and gives merit to the least of our actions.

So our principal end is, strictly speaking, charity; a charity which moves us to walk in the footsteps of the divine Shepherd, looking for the poor sheep who have strayed from the sheepfold of God and who in the end become the outcasts of the world. A preacher told us recently: "The world loves sin, but hates the sinner. It despises her, it abandons her. It is rigorous towards the soul for whose fall it is responsible. Only Christian faith welcomes her."

Our Holy Constitutions begin and end with Charity. Our vocation is one of zeal, an apostolate of charity. If, by the grace of God, we are faithful to our vows and Our spiritual exercises, we may legitimately hope for salvation.

*Woe to the world because of scandals. (Matt. 18. 7)*

3. A terrible thought is that, unhappily, there could and will be Religious who are damned. St. John Chrysostom says: "I know that a great many religious persons are saved, but I also know that some damn themselves." Too many religious, once fervent and then unfaithful, never recover from this infidelity. These are like trees which are so barren that in the end they are cut down as dead wood. In the Sacred College, out of the twelve chosen Apostles, there was one traitor. Our Lord, in His goodness, warned His disciples that one of them would betray Him; and you know how upset they were, asking anxiously, "is it I, Lord?"

Once again, I must say, my dear daughters, how I tremble at the thought of the evils one unfaithful member can cause. There have been religious who were the light and pillar of their order. Their works were masterpieces, and yet, they betrayed the society which they had once loved and served. Such scandals can only come from an initial infraction of the vows. Once a soul begins to be unfaithful, it is rare if even quite a slight difficulty does not lead to a total fall; it is also true that a religious faithful in small things will be faithful in big ones.

*Watch and Pray. (Matt. 26:41)*

4. Beloved daughters, let each of you question herself: would it be possible that I would deserve to be driven far away from Him for all eternity, for having abused so many graces, that in His goodness He continually offered me?

Oh, how Satan gloats when, in spite of precautions built into the rule, in spite of all the means of arriving at holiness offered to a religious, he is able to draw her towards him making her first careless in her duties and then luring her right into his net. What a frightful punishment for that unhappy soul! What fiery torment! She will fall into a pit all the deeper as the degree of glory offered her by God was high and which she renounced. The brighter the crown prepared for her in heaven, the deeper the darkness surrounding her.

O my dear daughters, let us hope that no-one will be condemned to curse God in hell, where the anguish will be a hundred times greater for knowing that she ruined herself; she who was called to save many souls, souls who, being sincerely contrite, knew how to correspond to the grace which she failed to profit from herself. And beware! One could invite a similar disaster by fickleness, by mere nothings, by a lack of a religious spirit or a spirit of sacrifice, for refusing to suffer and for failing to correct little faults in time, faults which grow bigger and could be responsible for our eternal loss.

*Do not conform any longer  
to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed  
by the renewing of your mind. (Rom. 12:2)*

5. The renewal of vows should result in a real renewal of our interior lives. Look deep into your hearts and see if there is anything which could displease God. Try and pause every now and then on the thought: "Man does not know if he is worthy of love or hate." Or, "The habit does not make the religious." Pious exercises and the practice of the rule are not enough to make a religious holy if they are done merely exteriorly. She must strengthen her vows, assure her salvation by means of mortification, selfdenial and whole-hearted obedience. She must guard her heart carefully and make of it a hermitage whose door is always closed, just like the Tabernacle.

Our cloister is protected by the garden wall, separating us from the world and inviting us to recollection. The veil is also a reminder of our cloistered state; and even the habit is a kind of enclosure. This is why people would mock at us, as though we were crazy, if we, enclosed religious, strolled round the public square in our habits. With greater reason would one laugh at a religious who

kept no inner enclosure, and consider her crazy as her mind wanders everywhere, and she wastes her time over things that she has nothing to do with.

*May the Father grant you strength and power  
through His Spirit in your inmost being  
that, through faith, Christ may dwell  
in your hearts in love. (cf. Eph. 3:16.17)*

6. Thomas A Kempis says: "The aim of the greatest saints is to serve God in a spirit of prayer. The spiritual man benefits from silence and solitude, and discovers the mysteries of Scripture."

What a Sister can gain from this renewal is so great that it may scarcely be put into words. Do your best to reach that degree of holiness to which God calls you, and above all, work seriously during these three days preceeding the Renewal of our Holy Vows. Imitate Mary, our model, who from the dawn of her life went into the silence of the Temple to live entirely in God. What a wonderful example our beloved Mother gives us! The Presentation in the Temple is really her public consecration to God. One could call her the first religious and our perfect model. It is with good and wise reason that this feast was given for our renewal of vows. So prepare to celebrate this beautiful day well, faithfully keeping your interior solitude, denying yourselves even legitimate pleasures which creatures may offer you. So you will be closely united to God and will, so to speak, see Him face to face. Keep our dear Lord company in the Tabernacle. There He gives us the most marvellous example of humility, self-abasement, sacrifice and self-denial. He is there in the ciborium, hidden from all. Moved by His great love, He allows Himself sometimes to be carried to the sick for their consolation, and to hide Himself in the hearts of those who find their happiness in hiding themselves in the depths of His love. You too, dear daughters, keep your solitude faithfully, only leaving it when obedience obliges you to do so for your neighbour's good. Even if you are engaged in work which seems to be distracting, never leave the inner silence of your heart.

*You are my Lord:  
apart from you I have nothing. (Ps. 16: 12)*

7. See how many virtues Mary practised in the Temple. How many times she renewed the gift of herself to the Lord! You too, go joyfully to the foot of the altar to tighten the ties which unite you to God. Your vows are like bonds of love! Be happy to bear His light yoke and, uniting yourself to Mary's act of consecration, frequently renew your promises made to Him, and take care never to forget the covenant you have made with the Lord your God.



## CHAPTER 17

### PREPARATION FOR THE RENEWAL OF OUR HOLY VOWS

*God calls for a response to His infinite love. (Const. 10)*

1. My dear daughters, we are told in our Constitutions that every year on the Feast of St. Michael, the Superior shall remind the Professed Sisters to prepare for the renewal of their vows. You see how important our founders considered this act, since they wished us to get ready for it two months beforehand. Indeed, on this renewal could depend the salvation of a Religious. If, in the course of a year, or even more, one had lost ground spiritually, having wasted the time God had given for well-doing, the Renewal of Vows gives one the chance to repair the wrong and begin again with fervour.

It is true that every month we renew our vows, but this is not preceded by a full retreat and the three days recollection before the Feast of the Presentation. The monthly renewal is a more or less private act, between God and ourselves. It should be made with fervour, but even holier dispositions will animate us at the Presentation. The solemn ceremony, the memory of our Lady's offering of herself made wholeheartedly, and with such faith and zeal joined to special interior graces of faith and love, all this invites us to perform this act as perfectly as possible. The state to which God has called us has a certain sublimity, because virginity allows the soul to belong totally to the Lord.

It is a tremendous gift to us given by the Lord, who chose us out of thousands of others. He said to us as to Abraham of old: "Leave your country and the soil of your ancestors and go to the land I shall show you." (Gen. 12: 1) He then gave us light which enabled our souls to see clearly the nothingness and emptiness of earthly ties. He gave us an attraction for the Religious Life and works of high charity, and added special graces to overcome the obstacles so often encountered by a soul wishing to follow God's call. To God be the glory and let us thank Him together for His wonderful mercy!

*Mary responded in openness to the Spirit  
... giving herself totally to the person  
and mission of Jesus. (Const. 9)*

2. Mary, ever faithful to grace, humbled herself; and have we not many reasons to humble ourselves, we who are so often unfaithful? This ceremony, which recalls our obligations, must surely bring to mind a crowd of shortcomings - faults against the Rule, the Vows observed, yes, but not perfectly. Oh, indeed, we must humbly ask pardon of our Lord for all these failings.

Our religious profession, once made, is irrevocable. You will then understand that this Renewal does not imply a new engagement. Just as Baptismal promises are renewed from time to time to recall certain obligations, so by this act they, as it were, bind the will anew without imposing fresh duties, but reminding us of those we already have, and rousing sorrow for not having kept them faithfully.

*This is not merely an outward ceremony:  
it is an act of the heart, sincere  
and without limits.*

3. "I confirm and renew with my whole heart": these are the words that we pronounce aloud on the Feast of the Presentation, in union with Mary's self offering. This is not merely an outward ceremony: it is an act of the heart, sincere and without limits, by which we mean to re-affirm the obligations undertaken at our Profession. So make this act with all the fervour of your soul. It is useful as a reminder of your engagements, and to engrave their memory ever more deeply in your heart; it is helpful too, to strengthen your good resolutions and to efface by your love many faults caused by thoughtlessness or forgetfulness.

I would like to speak to you also, about the monthly renewal of vows. Even if it is made in private, think who it is who witnesses it! What does the formula "signed by our hand" say? "O heavens, listen to what I say! Let earth hear the words of my mouth." (Deut. 32) Are such exclamations really needed to call heaven's attention to the act we are about to make, as though without them heaven would not notice what we were doing? Doesn't it seem that we say this aloud to make God hear us? Can He not read our inmost thoughts? Do we really have to talk to Him so emphatically, as though we were afraid He would not notice us? No, of course, there is no such need!

*In truth, what have we offered to God  
that was not already His?*

4. Our beloved Founder wished us to use these words, borrowed from the Canticle of Moses, so that they would arouse in us, as Moses wished to arouse in the Israelites, the memory of the Lord's protection. We say these words to alert our souls to the act they are about to make. This is very important and so we call on heaven and earth to listen. We call on heaven to be security for our words, heaven which is our dearest desire. We call on earth to bear witness, as it were, that we want nothing, seek nothing, nor value anything of the things it offers the lovers of this world, that we only use it for the glory of its Creator.

After invoking heaven and earth, we add, "My heart speaks to you, O Jesus my Saviour, although I am but dust and ashes," words full of trust and humility. However good in itself and agreeable to God, the act of Religious Profession and the act of renewal may be, they would not be worth much unless made with deepest humility. In fact, what have we offered to God that was not already His, and given of His royal bounty? What have we of ourselves except nothingness and sin, bequeathed to us by our first parents? So isn't it right that we should acknowledge ourselves to be 'but dust and ashes'?

*By being faithful to their vows  
Religious will always be happy.*

5. I would like you to make a habit of renewing your vows whenever you go to Communion. I think it would be a good way of keeping them pure and intact. Several saints did this; Saint Arsenius renewed his every day and God gave him to understand that it pleased Him. Every year, on the anniversary of his profession, he gathered his disciples round him, gave them little presents, and took charge of the kitchen for the day. By being faithful to their vows, Religious will always be happy and obedient. Superiors will never consider anything as belonging to them: the vows of Poverty and Obedience will be kept strictly. As for me, I assure you that, as a Religious, I don't consider anything belongs to me more than to others. The day I come out of office, I shall not dispose of even a cent!

*Live joyfully with your God,  
Love Him, busy yourselves  
only for Him.*

6. The gift of a Religious vocation is so great that while we are in this life, we can never really understand it. St. John Chrysostom said that Religious have chosen a heavenly style of life that yields in nothing to the Angelic state, because spiritual Religious live together in the same joy and peace as the angels. And I am happy to say, dear daughters, that among you all I admire just such a sight. And things should be like that because, by virtue of Obedience, as St. Basil says, everybody's wills are, so to speak, enclosed and absorbed by the will of God. That is how a Community becomes an image of Paradise, and that is why you are so happy in your holy state. So rejoice on your Profession Day, rejoice on your Renewal Day. Be happy every day because the thought of being safe in our Lord's arms is balm to the heart.

Live joyfully with your God, love Him, think only of Him, busy yourselves only for Him; live for Him alone. Let Him be the breath of your soul. Give yourselves unreservedly to God and one day you will fall asleep on His Heart to awaken in His glory.

## CHAPTER 18

### ON HUMILITY

*What does the Lord require of you?*

*To act Justly, to love mercy*

*And to walk humbly with your God. (Mic. 6:8)*

1. During the retreat, my beloved daughters, you have been offered only exquisite desserts and wines. By that I mean that your spirit has savoured only sweetness and consolations, without meeting with any annoyances.

But for such sugary food to continue after the retreat would be bad for you spiritually, just as it would be harmful to health if, instead of bread and plain nourishing fare, you were served in the refectory only with sweetmeats.

So go back with fervour to your employments, and be prepared to put up with all the annoyances, troubles and humiliations which you will certainly meet in the course of your duties. If you were to pass several days without drinking, you would be quite dehydrated and devoured by burning thirst. In the same way, if you were never thwarted, if you experienced only consolation and praise, you would soon suffer from the burning fever of your own imperfections.

*The true measure of sanctity is humility. (St. J. Eudes O. C. 1:214)*

2. The principal fruit I would like you to gather from this retreat, and which we urge you to guard with care, is the virtue of humility; a virtue which is supremely pleasing to our Lord. It is the foundation of all holiness. Do everything possible to sow this noble virtue in your hearts. Without it, you will have no, or only imaginary, holiness which would fade away before the smallest trial or temptation. To think of practising virtue and attaining sanctity without beginning with humility is like building on clouds, without any foundations. Unfortunately, this is why there is so little solid virtue or deep devotion. Often say; "My God, do not let me pass a day without being humiliated," and when the day has passed without this happening, say like St. Teresa, "My God, I've done nothing for you today, and my day is lost for all eternity." Always choose the path that leads to humiliations and if you have not had the chance to meet with any, find one! Anyone consecrated to God who does not humble herself, becoming small in her own eyes, will never be solidly virtuous. She will always be tepid and unhappy in her imperfections. Why? Because the Lord rejects the proud and raises a wall between Himself and them. He withholds His grace from the proud, while, on the contrary, He draws the humble to Himself, and overwhelms them with His kindness and favours.

*Humility is a profound acknowledgement*

*of what we really are in God's sight. (St. J. Eudes O. C. 1:215)*

3. My dear daughters, humility is the key to every treasure, nothing being dearer to the Heart of God than someone really humble, really stripped of self-love. And yet, nothing is rarer than to find this virtue in souls. It is so contrary to our nature, which has been, so to say, eaten up with pride from the beginning. So it is written: "Pride is the root of all sin." (*Eccles. 15*) Yes, Pride caused the fall of Satan and his angels, and was the ruin of our first parents. It is pride which wrecks a host of Christians, religious among them. Pride is such a subtle poison, which is nourished, sometimes, even in piety and the seeming practice of virtue.

There are too many people who are mistaken on this subject, who are blind on this all-important point, and who end by incurring terrible chastisements. "Let him who thinks he is standing, take care lest he fall," says St. Paul. Think of Solomon or Tertullian. They could hardly have begun more promisingly, and yet where did pride lead them?

*Humility of heart consists in loving one's abasement  
... in being glad to be little and despised. (S.J E. O C. 1:221)*

4. Let us pray for humility, dear daughters; pray for it for ourselves, for those who have responsibility in the house, because the devil knows so well how to catch them. He sets in motion all sorts of means to ruin by pride above all those who fill a rather more important role. I beg of you, work at becoming humble. This will be not only by humiliations which may come your way, but above all, by prayer and self-knowledge.

O, my dear daughters, how it saddens me that we are not what people believe us to be! Would we be worthy of being religious and yet be anxious for honours and important posts? The Scriptures are full of awesome sayings on pride. Here are a few which strike me forcefully:

**"God withdraws His grace from the  
proud and gives it to the humble."**

**"Pride builds a dividing wall  
between a proud soul and God."**

**"The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,  
while God rejects those of the proud."**

I assure you, I would much rather see devils walking about the enclosure than proud religious. At least one would recognize the demons for what they are!

*Pride is surely the deadliest of sins,  
or at least the silliest of absurdities. (L. P. Jacks)*

5. Pride strides ahead and makes terrifying progress. You know how much couch grass smothers field and garden? It is the same with pride. Two or three proud Sisters are sufficient to sow discord throughout a community. The Wise Man says: "There are always quarrels among the proud." (Prov. 13: 10) Who could say to what extent pride blinds us poor mortals and makes us sometimes ridiculous.

A certain person, having been corrected for a fault, said to her Superior: "I wrap myself in the cloak of my humility." To which the Superior replied: "I should imagine you could wear your cloak, even in the hottest-days: it's thin enough!"

Again, I implore you, Sisters, work to become humble. "Do not be wise in your own eyes, for pride goes before a fall." (Prov. 3:7) The Fathers of the Desert tell the story of how a certain solitary of Thebaid, all puffed up by his own virtues, went to visit St. Palemon. He was conversing with the latter and his disciples on spiritual matters when he noticed on one side a big fire kindled for the use of the solitaries. He suddenly rose and said to Palemon: "If you and your disciples really have hearts full of faith, let me prove it by walking bare foot on these live coals" Palemon counselled him wisely, warning him not to be deceived by the enemy. However, he, swollen by pride and presumption, sprang on to the fire. God permitted that, for his own undoing, the devils should protect him from burning. He turned to Palemon and his disciples and said with great insolence: "Where is your faith?" and jeering left them. But retribution caught up with him, for almost immediately a devil, under the form of a wild animal set up and chased him up and down the mountains until, at the end of his strength, he threw himself into a burning furnace and perished.

*In the sight of infinite wisdom.  
there is more value in a single act of humility  
than in all the knowledge of the world. (St. Teresa of Avila)*

6. It is imperative to be solidly based on true humility, for the proud fall like dry leaves. Our Saviour said: "He who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 13:12)

If we are really humble, what great things we shall do! Do not be inconsistent and restless. Don't seek yourselves! Love to be hidden in God. I predict for self-seekers many crosses, tears and aridities. She who relies on herself, who believes she can carry out the works of our apostolate in her own strength, will be the scourge of the Congregation.

One day the Lord showed St. Anthony the whole surface of the earth, so covered with snares set by the devils that it seemed almost impossible to take a step without being caught. Trembling, St. Anthony cried out: "Lord, who could ever avoid such dangers?" A voice replied: "Those who are really humble." My dear daughters, we should have the words of our Constitutions on humility inscribed in letters of gold on the walls of our Chapter room. If we observe them faithfully, we shall have nothing to fear at our judgement. How I wish that we could all speak to God as David did: "You know, Lord, that in the successes you have granted me, my heart is not proud, my eyes are not haughty." Although our Rule does not exact of us great austerities, it does require us to be thoroughly humble. Now if, for example, you adopt a mournful, cold and sulky attitude when the Superior has seen fit to correct you, would you say that was being humble?

*True humility consists in being humble  
as Jesus was on earth, being ready to bear  
all the ignominies that are due to sin . (cf. S.J.E. O.C. 1:221)*

7. A holy man once asked a fellow religious if, in soliciting alms, he had ever suffered blows. The latter replied that such an insult had never befallen him. The holy man then said, "I thought you were a man of God, but I see you are still a mere child without a mature man's experience. As for me, I consider it one of the greatest graces ever given me by the Lord to have been driven from a house with blows, and all sorts of insults."

On a winter's night of intense cold and heavy snow, St. Francis Borgia arrived at one of the Order's houses. He knocked and rang, and receiving no reply, the saint rejoiced at being kept waiting. The porter eventually opened the door with a thousand apologies. A big fire was lit and every attention was shown to the saint, who said: "Ah, you are spoiling God's work! I thought I could merit some grace, and see how I've lost my chance!" Let us imitate the humility of the one and the charity of the other.

Another time, when travelling, he was obliged to sleep on straw next to his companion, an old and sick man full of catarrh, who coughed incessantly. What was worse, thinking he was facing the wall, he coughed and splattered right on the saint. When morning came, and he realised what he had done, he was quite inconsolable, and was at a loss to excuse himself. The saint, however, comforted him and said laughingly that really he had given him pleasure, that it hadn't troubled him. In fact, it was the best spot in the room for him, as he was the most unworthy object there.

If any of you has such a low opinion of herself, I would be delighted to know. If, however, you take offence and are touchy about the least thing that inconveniences you, or that you are refused, how would you act in such circumstances?

*Don't be too frightened  
of being humiliated. (S.M.E.)*

8. I beg you with all my heart, take care not to be pious hypocrites, with whom one must wear gloves when speaking to them. The proud build their houses on quick sands, and it is possible that proud religious would not hesitate to compromise the honour of their convent or their Congregation, to defend their precious persons. How different from our Sisters who, at this moment, are calumniated and harassed but who write: "Oh, dear Mother, I am quite ready to be set aside so long as the works of the Congregation go ahead and flourish. That is enough to make me happy." Don't be too frightened of being humiliated. Look at our Lord at Judas' feet. Who can say: "My heart is pure, I am free from sin."? (Prov. 20:9) No one can say that, while living in this world. If we search our hearts, we shall find them full of faults. The Venerable Anne of St. Bartholemew, St. Teresa's companion and coadjutrix, a privileged soul from her childhood, really thought herself a great sinner. She would sigh bitterly, seeing herself as the cause of all the calamities, then afflicting the town where she was. The

Sisters would say: "But, Mother, you must realise there are many greater sinners in the world. So why blame yourself for all these disasters?" "I know very well" she replied, "that there are greater sinners. But that does not alter the fact that each one of us must carry her sins before God's judgement seat, like a bundle of wood to be burned, and perhaps ours will displease Him more than all the others . . . . .

*Everything they (the Pharisees) do  
is done for men to see;  
whoever exalts himself will be humbled. (Matt. 23:5, 12)*

9. Beware of esteeming yourselves more than anyone else. After all, why is it that we are not among criminals? It is only God's goodness that has protected us from the dangers of the world, has guarded us, and hidden us in the shadow of His wings. If we had been sunk in destitution or born of bad parents, perhaps we would have been as wicked as others! Our Lord has willed to pour out His gifts and graces on us - a motive to thank Him and humble ourselves, and nothing to be complacent about. Besides, the uncertainty of our final perseverance should always keep us in holy fear.

How often, alas, has one not seen Religious who, having spent a good part of their lives in penances and holy exercises, have yielded to thoughts of pride and so to grave faults. Couldn't what happens to others also happen to us? St. Philip Neri, convinced as he was of his own nothingness, prayed every day: "Lord, bind me to you as with chains, for if you leave me for a single moment I am capable of the greatest excesses." Each day we should pray in that sense, for we certainly have no more reason than this great saint to have confidence in our own strength.

*If you are not humble,  
you will never have  
the true spirit of charity. (S.M.E.)*

10. If our Lord knew of a surer road to heaven than humility, Without doubt He would have taught it to us. You will never have to go the lengths to which He chose to go. Which of you was cradled in a trough? Who has been calumniated as He? Who has been tortured on a Cross? The disciple should not be above his Master, We have already told you, dearest Sisters, that with humility alone, without other austerities than those the Rule prescribes, you can make great progress in holiness. Notice that I am not talking about a spineless humility, better named cowardice, which avoids holy enterprises and pretends indifference to everything, under the false pretext of avoiding pride. It is quite easy, if one is so minded, to be useless in a congregation. The refectorians, the Sisters in charge of the clothing, do not enquire whether Sisters have worked before serving them. They give what is needed to each one, and that is right. I must remind you, however, that God sees all, that He will know how to correct those who neglect their duties or fail to do all the good they might. A humble religious is convinced she has no merit, because she knows that she can do nothing by herself while, however, being capable of doing everything with God's help. So she works with a] l her heart at what has been entrusted to her, without becoming discouraged, no matter what happens.

*The more humble you are  
the more the Institute will be blessed;  
you will take heaven by storm. (S.M.E.)*

11. O my dear daughters, if you were really humble, you would be precious religious worth more than gold and silver. By humility you will be preparing to go to the conquest of souls. You will be worthy one day to become missionaries. Those who appear only to possess very average talents but are humble are capable of anything with God's help.

So, love humility. Love to be little, to be forgotten. To a sense of your own wretchedness join an unbounded trust in the goodness of God, and everything in your religious life will be easy. Humility will be like an anchor keeping you steady in storms. You will not allow yourselves to be cast down by contradictions nor by weariness, not even by the falls occasioned by your own faults. You will be strong with the strength of God, and you will grow, day by day, in a closer union with Him. May this be, as I have said, dear daughters, the principal fruit of your retreat. In this way you will be sure to walk without getting lost on the road to heaven.

## CHAPTER 19

### AFTER THE RETREAT - RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE

*True silence is interior and creative  
and meditation leads us to this. (P. Craig)*

1. While you were in retreat, I thought with joy of all the graces you were drawing down on the Congregation. If ten just men were enough for God to save Sodom, what wouldn't He do for this dear flock praying all day before the Blessed Sacrament!

Now, dearest daughters, you have drunk long draughts of grace and so you must be full of holy thoughts and desires. As St. Augustine says, "I have seen souls as laden with merits as ships from the Indies laden with gold." But take care not to let such treasures evaporate, as do precious liqueurs left uncorked. Your heart would soon become dry, and the retreat be useless. It is by the frittering away of spiritual energy and attention by useless talk that you will lose your good dispositions. On the contrary, it is by silence and recollection that you will turn to account the graces given you. Never imagine that the waste of spiritual energy in trivialities, which you have been told is the stumbling block to an interior life, is caused by your work. A religious who would say that working with our girls, or doing anything else given her by obedience, prevents her from praying or being interiorly recollected, seems to me like a fish asserting that it couldn't live in a lake because there was too much water in it. To persuade yourself of this, dear daughters, notice those who are busier here, and those who are less so, and there see who are the most interior. Personally, I find that a portress, a cook, a baker who work with zeal, talking only where necessary, are more virtuous than others who want to pray all day. In our chapel in Rome there was a picture which really touched me. It showed St. Elizabeth of Hungary being constantly interrupted at prayer. Each time she left it when called, her angel beside her inscribed in the Book of Life her promptitude and willingness. Be sure, dear daughters, that you will be more pleasing to God in your sections and other employments than in an idle life that you believe, by faulty judgement, to be more conducive to holiness.

*The only dangers I fear for you  
are shallowness, talkativeness etc .....*

2. It doesn't need great virtue to make a retreat or make one's prayer. It is rather in action that we show what profit and what virtues we have drawn from prayer. The only dangers I fear for you are shallowness and faults against silence, a lack of restraint, inquisitiveness in the way we use our eyes, and our general deportment. Remember your resolutions which you placed on the altar, and which you probably took on this question of control of the senses, which was so emphasized by the preacher as being a sure guarantee of the interior life.

I will answer for your holiness if you are faithful. Then I shall see my hopes for you fulfilled. In this life of silence and recollection you will pray much, especially for the Institute, that God may bless our labours. And you will see this dear Institute making progress towards holiness.

## CHAPTER 20

### AFTER A YEAR OF CROSSES AND TRIALS

*I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed But if it dies, it produces many seeds. (John 12:24)*

1. My dear daughters, the year which has just passed has been one of sufferings as well as of improvements. Like Lebanon cedars, we have been struck by axes and put to the test in order to grow taller and stronger. It is a good thing when a Religious Order sometimes suffers trials; it rouses itself and keeps up its fervour.

St. Vincent de Paul considered it a misfortune when a person or a Congregation had nothing to suffer. St. Ignatius thought the same. One day, looking very distressed, he replied to those who asked the reason: "I fear that in one of our Provinces they have proved themselves unworthy, by some infidelity, to share in the Passion of our Lord. Up to now they have no cross to bear." Another time, he seemed more cheerful than usual. He explained, "I am happy because Our Lord deigned to appear to me and promised, in answer to my prayer, that, indeed, the Company would never cease to enjoy the priceless heritage of His Cross; it would encounter opposition and persecution everywhere."

*A decline in fervour?.....A frightful disaster!*

2. Dearest daughters, if we cease to suffer, we shall cease to be fervent. In the same way, the Institute will never be so beautiful as when it is persecuted. It might decline in fervour if it suffered no opposition. That would be a warning of a frightful disaster, from which we must beg God for the grace to be delivered.

Notice, dear daughters, that right from the beginning the order has been thwarted in countless ways. Our first Mothers(1) were ten years without Novices, and during that time they were certainly not fed on milk and honey, for they carried other very heavy crosses. You know, too, how our heavenly Father, not content with casting here and there the seeds of suffering he usually gives to His beloved children, plants us deep in His front-line fields. He allows us to suffer persecutions and calumnies, so that the root of humility growing ever deeper in us, we may extend and grow taller and increase the harvest of good works proper to our vocation. God has great plans for our Institute. Only by way of the Cross shall we accomplish them.

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1. Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge. our vocation. God has great plans for our Institute. Only by way of the Cross shall we accomplish them.

*The Order is founded on Mount Calvary (Old Const.)*

3. Happy those who live and die on the Cross. So long as we do not, by our infidelities and failures in the Rule, deserve to have God's graces withdrawn, we must not worry about the pain we feel. St. Jolin had less merit resting on our Lord's heart than when he stood at the foot of the Cross on Calvary. So we must live in God and for God, entirely yielded to Him, which, for us, is both easy and necessary. Easy, when we consider that all our actions, even the smallest, serve by virtue of our holy Rule to unite us to God. Necessary, as you know better than I could explain and several of you have understood by experience. Our works, which cost us so many sighs, so much labour, for which we sacrifice our days and, indeed, our lives, see how they are cruelly criticized, opposed and sometimes calumniated! If they do not seem to prosper, the charge of being imprudent is ordinarily at hand to fling at us. We are accused of being irresponsible; our enemies laugh at us. Clearly, we would be mad if we acted for any other motive than that of pleasing God!

O yes, let's always live that we may trustfully say, "I live in God, I act only for God" as a young sister wrote in a poem, her heart overflowing with these feelings. The refrain after each couplet runs:



**I live in God, I live for God, and He  
- oh bliss supreme -  
My heaven is, wherever I may be.**

You are founded on Mount Calvary, dear daughters. On this height learn to become strong so as not to be shaken by the injustices of men. Oh, how hard these injustices are! Often, in fact, they cause good people to waver and vacillate. So don't be surprised if you are crucified, for you wrest too many souls from hell not to make many enemies. These adversaries will not always be lay people, for your aim is so lofty they cannot fail to respect it. No, you will sometimes be injured by persons consecrated to God, all the more because they will not understand your intentions, and want credit for themselves.

*We must get used to living only for God*

4. People are not always loyal and grateful; there are some, nevertheless. I can mention, among others, a man of the world whom I was able to help some years ago. He was so touched that on many occasions he wanted to show his gratitude. Quite lately, when things seemed to threaten us with great danger, he came to encourage me and to tell us that he would not have failed to warn us of what was happening and to defend us vigorously. But, as I said, gratitude is rare, and we must get used to living only for God and to expect thanks only from Him.

Courage! Go ahead and save souls! Go and multiply Tabernacles where our Lord may dwell on earth. That will be a motive for confidence at life's end, for it will be a claim for mercy before our judge. May this hope stay alive in your hearts. It will comfort you in your labours, raise your courage and so make you ever worthier of your vocation.

A holy priest was asked, on his deathbed, which Order he considered was nearest in spirit to the Society of Jesus. He answered that he thought it was the Good Shepherd Order, because its special mission most resembled that of our Lord on earth. There are vocations whose particular end is the good of children, for example, in orphanages and schools. But we must work not only for the care of children. Our zeal must be directed to the salvation of those poor souls who, without the help we are called to give them, would perhaps be lost eternally. Oh, how we must take these persons to heart! We must be good to them without limiting our generous zeal.

*Great graces will follow sufferings.*

5. My dear daughters, you are destined to fight hand to hand with formidable enemies! In fact, I could say that you are in the front ranks of the army which combats the tendencies Of Perverse human nature. Have your weapons always at hand, for you are dealing with a foe who never sleeps, who is always lying in wait for you. If you have crosses and troubles, remember what Our Lord said to His apostles when He was sending them out to convert the world: "You will be persecuted, you will suffer much for my Name." (Matt. 5:11)

We must, dear daughters, accept corrections from the hand of God as though they were caresses. It is His Heart which lovingly allows these things. Let us humble ourselves under His fatherly hand. Great graces will follow these sufferings. After all He has done for Lis, can we doubt anything He may do now? What troubles, what sufferings the gaining of a single soul may cost you! But God, who has enriched you with special graces, who gives you so much light in the exercise of our fourth vow, has also promised that you will win in the battle. All He asks is perfect fidelity as you make your way along the road traced by His fatherly providence. Expect help from God alone, for one trusts in vain in man. "Who trusts in human strengths, falls." (cf. 2Chron. 32:8)

What does help from men really add up to? Someone who is for you today, tomorrow will declare himself against you. Notice, also, that when one is suffering, far from relieving it, nearly everyone, one way or another contributes to increasing it, if it were merely by questioning your prudence. It is only when something succeeds that each one comes hurrying to rejoice with you and tells you how they prayed for the success obtained, foresaw it and desired it. According to this world's

prudent prophets, this house of Angers could never possibly have been established. They took away every shred of hope. We must not admit, said they, either orphans or Magdalens. Then when, in fact, these sections were opened, they came from all sides asking us to accept someone, vying with one another in saying, "Oh, we always knew that this house would be of enormous value for the public good!"

*Nothing should attach you more to your vocation than to be nailed to the Cross. (S. M. E.)*

6. Generally speaking, we must be more alarmed at prosperity than adversity. Our Institute is hateful to Hell, that is why it is always warring against us. Remember how we had at last, by dint of perseverance, founded a house at Perpignan? Well, an adjacent building caught fire near where our Sisters had installed the grills in the parlour, and other things prescribed by the Rule. Prayer saved them. Everyone agrees that it was by our Lady's special protection that the flames never reached them.

St. Clement says there is not a more perfect image of the Divinity than a soul who is as calm in affliction as in consolation. Remember that everything passes here on earth. Consequently, only sin can really grieve us, because it offends God.

I would like to advise you again not to want to be sent to our more comfortable convents. However, you may well wish to have the means of enlarging our houses and increasing our sections. It's not only allowed, but is praiseworthy. What is essential is that you are not afraid of poverty, nor of obstacles along your path. Go right ahead. Be like the fisherman: he goes on casting his nets, always hoping for a catch. Then let God act. He knows what we need better than we do. After all, we are only weak instruments which He deigns to use in the fulfilment of His will. Don't look for consolations, nor rely on your own strength. Do not give way to discouragement or repugnance. Never say: "I am not capable of such an employment, I cannot do it." But with all the faith and strength which comes from obedience, set to work. Then, whether you succeed as you would wish, or whether you fail, the Lord will know how to enrich your soil and glorify His Name.

*The devil will sift you, will play you tricks, will raise up people against you; don't be afraid. (S. M. E.)*

7. I must tell you of something, dear children, that happened to me when I left Tours to go to Angers. I went to the Ursuline Convent, of which Mine de Lignac was Superior, from where I was to take the diligence. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by discouragement and uncertainty. It seemed to me I could do no good, that I would even prevent something which others could carry out. I was on the point of turning back when I was told a priest (M. Pasquier) wished to speak to me. As soon as I walked in, this saintly man said to me, as though inspired, "Mother, you are struggling under a temptation. The Lord has just made it known to me while at prayer. Woe to you if you yield! It is not humility which is making you waver, it is the weakness of nature. Be strong, leave for Angers and you will see that God, by means of you, wants to do great works for His glory."

Listen to what I tell you, dearest daughters. Working in the apostolate you will often have interior sufferings or vexations with regard to the children. I was in that state for several years, so I speak from experience. This life of struggle is easily explained, arising from the very nature of our vocation. If you snatch his victories from the devil, don't be surprised if he becomes furious and turns on you. You will even be able to measure the extent of your victories by the violence of his reaction against you.

In your life of labour, dear daughters, you are Jesus on His cross. Each of you has accepted her mission from the hands of the Incarnate Word, and A your sufferings are, as it were, your co-operation in the mystery of the Redemption.

So renounce completely your personal concerns. Don't seek yourself in anything. Refuse to be beaten by any difficulty. When your soul is in darkness, wait patiently for the light. Let us suffer everything for God, lose everything for God, and we shall find everything in God.

## CHAPTER 21

### A LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF NANTES - THE SALVATION OF SOULS

We will begin our talk, dear Sisters, by reading a letter from Monsignor de Hercé to our French Novices.

We also have one for each nationality - English, German, Italian - and we shall give them theirs so that they can read them amongst themselves; meanwhile, let's read this one. It is addressed to: The Dear French Novices of the Good Shepherd Congregation, Angers.

"My beloved daughters, what have I done to merit your very nice letter? In spirit I am with you all. I am edified, charmed and moved by your piety -and your prayer, and shower upon you all the blessings which His unworthy servant has asked for you! Every day at Mass I particularly mention this dear Novitiate, this fervent Congregation whose one aim is to convert souls who have strayed. When I pronounce the blessing at the end of Mass, my thoughts fly especially to the Good Shepherd and England with deep emotion and affection. What I am not worthy to obtain for you, children of my heart, you will, please God, get yourselves by your piety, your candour and your devotion to the pursuit of good. Yes, indeed, I am proud to be a compatriot of so many chosen souls, whose good example I admire and who fly with holy zeal to distant shores to find souls to save. My affection also embraces the English and others, for as you know, our common homeland is in heaven. What a feast for me if and when I revisit your delightful enclosure! How good to celebrate the anniversary of the beautiful day spent among you, but I don't think I should myself seek that satisfaction. The Lord will decide, will arrange things and if He wants us to meet again, that will make me very happy. Now, if I were a missionary Bishop with no obligations to stay in my Diocese, I would be free to visit you, to talk with you about the things of God, to admire the care with which your zeal surrounds souls suffering from the consequences of sin. By doing that I would be following a natural bent in which, I'm afraid, grace would not play the greater part!

**In the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary,  
with gratitude and affection  
my dearest children**

**Your very devoted servant,**

**† J. Francis, Bishop of Nantes"**

*My heart is not worth much,  
but I want to give God  
the whole of it (Mgr. de Hercé)*

1. How wonderfully kind the Bishop is! The affection is certainly due to his great charity and Zeal. The last time he was here he said: "Madame, I would not have come back if you had not written and I must admit that, had you not invited me, I would have been disappointed. I love your Institute so much ! I am so interested in your dear English Novices (1) and allow me to say, Reverend Mother, that the joy, goodness and happiness visible in your daughters' faces tell one that the Lord is in their hearts.

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1.Mgr. de Hercé emigrated to England and was given lavish hospitality there.

." Oh! what lights I received in the short conversation I was fortunate to have with this good Bishop! What zeal inflames his great soul! He said to me; "I want nothing to stop me; I would like to be capable of everything to procure God's glory. There's nothing I would not do for that intention. My heart is not worth much, but I want to give God the whole of it. One cannot be a Christian, and not feel devoured by Zeal, and a burning desire to win souls for God."

St. Antony, hermit, after seeing St. Paul, said to his monks that he and they were only shadows of hermits. Wouldn't we admit, after knowing this prelate so filled with zeal, that we too, are only shadows of Good Shepherd Religious? The longing to do good to others, to extend and increase the glory of God, ennoble the soul with heavenly thoughts. Nothing costs, nothing seems difficult to a heart moved by real charity, because charity becomes the principle of all it does. Besides, the Scriptures tell us that, "God is love and whoever lives by love, lives in God and God in him." (1 Jn. 4:16) Learn, dearest daughters, to work for souls in a spirit of love

*Learn to forget yourselves.*

2. As from now, seek rather to prevent God being offended, than to keep your eye on a future reward, that really is to work for the glory of God. Learn to forget yourselves. Be sure, too, that even if you haven't the time to breathe, you can become saints provided you are busy procuring the glory of God. Again and again we see the proof of this with regard to our Sisters in the foundations, who become more and more interior and holy, in the midst of manifold works. See what missionaries are doing. What privations! How much suffering! And they tell us that to save souls is worth all the trouble. They have trudged day and night, climbing mountains covered with ice and snow, going without proper rest for months on end, and even going barefoot when their shoes wear out. Many die from fatigue, feeling nothing is too much for their dear missions. Yes, missionary work entails great sacrifices. Without firm commitment and great eagerness to do good one would be quite useless for such work. A cowardly religious, who avoids weariness and opposition is incapable of winning souls; in every way she is too smallminded. You will suffer for souls, dear daughters, but remember these comforting words: "Those who will have taught the way of righteousness to others will shine as stars for ever." (Dan. 12:3) The greater the number of souls you will have won for God, the greater will be your heavenly reward.

*What it costs to save a soul!*

3. "Our vocation is a kind of martyrdom!", exclaimed a fervent religious. Still young and innocent as a child, she worked with the penitents and won all hearts for God. Only one very corrupt young girl resisted grace and got to the point of imploring the Sister not to pray for her as every time she did so, she felt tormented; she was however quite decided to stay as she was. Understandably the sister redoubled her prayers. One day after Holy Communion, she felt so inflamed with love for this soul, that she offered herself to God to take on all the temptations of this poor child in exchange for all her consolations. The young girl, who immediately felt the impact of this generous prayer, came to the Sister, pulled her mantle and said: "Mother, what are you doing? You are praying for me, and you know I don't want it! From that moment she was changed, wept copiously and never committed a voluntary fault again. The courageous Sister, however, felt her soul plunged into darkness and was prey to such frightful temptations that she felt she was a different person. Sometimes just before Holy Communion she went to the Superior and asked her what she should do; it was only by obedience that she ventured to go to Communion. This state of interior turmoil and anguish continued until she developed a serious illness which led to her death. It was only a few moments before she died that calm was restored to her soul and she exclaimed: "Oh, what it costs to save a soul!" She left the Superior free to tell her story, then she intoned the Laudate and died.

*We must be very patient....*

4. Be sure I am not citing this example as one you should follow. Indeed, no! I think, on the contrary, that this dear Sister, in offering herself as a victim in this way, may have been imprudent. I only want to show you how much her fourth vow meant to her. You, too, love your fourth vow. I must admit, dearest Sisters, that I feel a burning and devouring zeal for souls. When I think of all that doctors do to save the body, of how they study to succeed, I reproach myself for not working as much to save souls that are infinitely more precious than bodies! To do this one must know how to suffer

and put up with privations and many troubles. Also, we must be very patient with our dear girls. The doctor of one of our houses observed: "The Sisters of Charity are much to be admired. I am always surprised at everything they do, and their devotedness in carrying out their duties. So what must be said about the Sisters of the Good Shepherd? For them, the corporal well-being of the persons entrusted to them is second only to a more holy, more precious concern - the care of their minds and understanding. When they receive a poor young person and have made her clean and comfortable and encouraged her, they have scarcely begun. After having dressed her suitably and cheered her up, they set about creating in the soul a new world, by dint of instructions, counselling and so on." On the other hand a Jesuit father said:

"We priests who seek to save souls can only give them spiritual help. The Good Shepherd Sisters, however, apart from spiritual counselling, give them a mother's care, busying themselves with tender concern for the bodily wellbeing of these poor persons."

Certainly, my dear daughters, our work is responsible and to do it well we need self-denial and courage. But the firm intention to do good to our neighbour gives us strength to rise above our own weakness and when God is really loved, one puts up with everything for His sake.

*Cling to your vocation like ivy to the elm!*

5. So, dearest children, work at forming your characters, so as to reach that degree of holiness to which you are called. For this you must pray much. Ask our Lord for the grace to correspond with our sublime vocation; the higher it is the more you will need divine help. Work wholeheartedly at the work which you have been given and you will hear one day from the Lord's own lips: "Come, faithful servant, come and receive the reward you have earned by your labours and your virtues." (cf. *Matt.* 35:24)

## CHAPTER 22

### ON ADVENT

*Be comforted, my people  
I will save you, never fear! (Liturgy)*

1. My dear daughters, Advent is a time of recollection and salvation; a time of grace to be used profitably. From December 17th the antiphons in the Office begin with "O" to express adoration and love, the very feelings of Our Lady. How did she spend the days before Our Lord's birth? How much she must have longed to see this child who was Himself her Creator! She was in a state of continual contemplation. Jesus will be born again in our hearts; let us adore Him like Mary! I always look forward to this holy season, and I see it pass with regret. There are so many holy thoughts to nourish us. We can unite ourselves to the Patriarchs and prophets, praying with them for the Messiah, for His coming into our souls. Listen to David calling on Him a thousand years before His coming, speaking to Him as though he already saw Him! And Isaiah, seven hundred years before, said He will eat butter and honey and from His lips will flow gentleness and kindness! Elsewhere it says of Him that never will He raise His voice in the city square. Should we not follow His example in this?

*Jesus chose the lowest place;  
no-one has ever succeeded in  
taking it away from Him. (Abbé Huvelin)*

2. Dearest daughters, during this time we must constantly think about the self - abasement of our God, desiring to meet Him in Holy Communion as the Patriarchs longed for the coming of the Messiah. Prepare for it with fervent aspirations. You can in this way, fill your minds while you work. Those who do the laundry, putting up with the cold, can yearn for their Saviour and think of His sufferings in the manger where He had neither roof nor covering. I'm sure, my poor dears, that you, who washed all day yesterday in the icy cold, must have really suffered; but I am also sure that such a day offered to God will have been very meritorious; I am convinced too, that all our Sisters who work so hard will not have much Purgatory, so long as they take care to do everything to please God.

*God calls? Travel together thro' the night,  
un encumbered and joyful, to find.....Love! (Anon)*

3. From now on we shall choose our companions on our journey to the stable in Bethlehem - you are quite free; some will go with the Shepherds, some with the Magi. I must admit I always go with the Shepherds, I daren't aim any higher! I love those poor Shepherds who, as soon as they heard the call, left behind their crooks and hastened to Jesus. They did not say, "But who will mind our sheep, the wolves will devour them and we don't know where we are going." That is what you should do to find God who calls you by the voice of your Superior. No arguing, no thinking it over -just go! Yes, I much prefer shepherdesses to queens who will not obey!

## CHAPTER 23

### CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY

*Your particular Star is your Rule.*

1. "Do well all that you do." These words, my dear daughters, give us some of the most important advice to be found in Sacred Scriptures, and I am glad to remind you of them in a special way, you who typify for me Jerusalem, the Holy City.

These past days have brought to mind the City of God. Hymns and Chants followed each other, feasts followed feasts. Midnight Mass, the crib, lights, New Year's Day, The Epiphany - we have been comforted by our dearest memories - our house was a beautiful Jerusalem and your innocent joy made me very happy. Our dear girls, too, enchanted by your carols said: "If the mothers sing so sweetly on earth, what must heaven be like?"

Now, in order to go on doing everything well it is essential that we make determined efforts to be recollected. Think that at this time thousands upon thousands of angels came down from heaven to adore our Lord. The Shepherds hasten to worship him in the Manger, and the Kings, following the Star, pay homage to our Divine Saviour. Your particular Star, dear daughters, is the Rule interpreted by the Constitutions and the wishes of your Superiors. Never stop anywhere but where they lead you, for that is where you will find God. Contemplating the Christmas mysteries will inspire you to offer fervent acts of love and adoration to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Be sure, my dear daughters, that the Cherubim and Seraphim throng round the altar and it is there, in their midst, that you speak with our Lord. So, in this holy place you should have the bearing of a queen before her king, as you are privileged to be the spouse of the King of Kings.

*Attentive prayer is like a scaffolding  
by which we climb to heaven.*

2. It is in the chapel, above everywhere else, that you must study to do all things well. What should you not do to become trained thoroughly in your interior practices: prayer, communion, spiritual reading, office, examination of conscience - in a word all your Spiritual Exercises! Prepare your souls by constant recollection and take care not to become uselessly distracted giving rein to your imagination. Don't forget what the saints tell us: if you neglect prayer, if you are not diligent in it, in one whole day you will not succeed in doing what you should have done in an hour; what is more, your work will be badly done. Personally, I think that for a Sister of the Good Shepherd, prayer is like a scaffolding by which she should climb to heaven. If your prayer is well made, it will support you; if not, it will collapse, and then, how will you be able to raise yourself?

Give your full attention to the recitation of the Office. Think that you are speaking to God himself, that you are singing the praises of Him whose grandeur fills heaven and earth. Oh, yes, if we were really penetrated by this truth, we would be so many angels on earth by the union of our souls with God. Don't limit yourselves to merely pronouncing the words, but to the words add the loving thoughts of your heart. The thought of God's presence will keep you in an attitude of reverence and adoration of His immense majesty. Don't yield to distractions. If, against your will, you have them, complain about it to our Lord but without agitation; they are due to human weakness and without a special privilege of divine grace, it is impossible to be totally exempt from them.

Do everything well especially when participating in the Mass. Let the holiness of the Lord's sacrifice penetrate to the depths of your soul. Be aware of the importance of approaching the altar; take your place at the holy table with love, and humble yourself profoundly when you have had the happiness of being nourished by the Lord's own body.

*Thoughtful reading is a powerful  
help in the Spiritual Life.*

3. Once again I implore you to pay attention to spiritual reading. It will give you light, and teach you what you must do, it allows you to see your shortcomings. Apply what you read or hear read to

yourselves, fix it in your memory to put into practice when needed. Thoughtful reading is a powerful help in the spiritual life. I have experienced that. Being no good at handwork, during my years as a young religious, all I had to do was dust the choir stalls. I told our Mother how this troubled me, and she told me to use my spare time in reading the lives of the Saints and Holy Scriptures; for the time would come when I would be overwhelmed with work, and this would prove very helpful. Indeed, the more I read Holy Scriptures the more I loved its beauty. At the end of the day, examine your conscience carefully. If you are faithful to this point of Rule be sure that you will avoid many faults, and make it almost impossible to forget your duty. Also, make your particular examen and the examen of foresight and you will prove their great usefulness. Never, never omit this important practice. By the faithful observance of the Rule, we can draw down a flood of blessings on our Congregation. We must acquire a double portion of holiness and zeal because our work for souls will double. What has been done up to now is almost nothing compared to what we shall have to do in the future.

*In our life nothing is unimportant.*

4. In a community each member aims at attaining true holiness by doing as well as she can the work assigned to her. For example, the Sister who rings the bells can gain much merit by her punctuality and exactitude, while, on the contrary, she may prolong her purgatory by culpable carelessness. If, by being late ringing the bell, she shortens the time of prayer she grieves the Heart of Our Lord. Or she could be the cause of breaches of silence during the time laid down for recollection. Though these faults seem trivial it must be said that in religion, nothing is unimportant. May she who works, work; she who prays, pray; she who teaches, teach; and each in her sphere of work do well what she has to do. If you should have no other employment than dusting the stalls, sweeping the house or washing up, all should be done with purity of intention and holy eagerness. Be sure that, in a religious house, a sister who is exact in accomplishing humble duties often renders greater service than another engaged in more intellectual work. Exercising this care and exactitude, everyone of you can be very useful in her employment. Each member of the Congregation must devote herself to the general good of the Institute. Sometimes one comes across egoists who think only of themselves, and take so little interest in what concerns the Community as a whole, that, should they see the house fall in ruins they wouldn't worry; they would only look to their own interests! Others, for want of reflection, act light - mindedly and waste time on trifles at a time when serious matters are in question. I also beg of you to be careful not to go hither and thither, trying to find out what's happening, gossiping uselessly about what others are doing, wasting your time, neglecting your duties and perhaps, committing sins against charity. May the words of St. Paul never be true of any of you: "There are among you restless persons, who do no work and interfere with what is no business of theirs." (2 Tit. 3:11)

*Work, but remember to come back often to God.*

5. Busy yourselves with God, with the Congregation, with your work, and don't worry about what others do. If you are a gardener, cultivate your garden, if a cook, take care of your kitchen, if you are in charge of the girls, take care of your children. These will one day witness to their gratitude for the good you have done them; they will tell you that they owe their happiness to you, that your watchful concern led them to eternal life. If you talk to a daughter of Chanty you will see that she is quite preoccupied with treating her invalids. Speak to a Carmelite and she will be full of St. Teresa. And what about us? We should think only of the salvation of souls! Notice how people in the world make every effort to improve themselves in particular circumstances. Writers, traders, craftsmen all seek to do the best they can. And you, my dear daughters, take care not to do things simply to be rid of them. To live in a lax manner is to be a burden on others and irksome to oneself - in fact, what do you imagine a poor Superior could do with six sisters of whom four took no interest in anything?

Work zealously at your tasks, but remember to come back often to God. I would be worried if, in giving yourself to work, you neglected study; or when you undertook study you neglected manual work. At every moment do what has to be done and do it just as it should be done. There is a time for everything and you should know how to go from one thing to another, giving to each the time prescribed. When you go to the groups, go straight there, without veering to the right or the left hand. Don't be one of those people who never reach their objective without having been diverted a hundred times. And when you come to recreation, come eagerly and cheerfully. Talk together joyfully,



remembering the presence of God, and aware that angels watch over you, and help in a special way those who contribute to the pleasure of others.

*Mary did nothing extraordinary,  
but she did everything perfectly.*

6. Yes, do well all that you do. In that really consists the perfection of your state and, particularly, the perfection of obedience. You must not dream of doing extraordinary things, of having ecstasies or transports, shining by your talents or your wit, but by doing faithfully everything that obedience expects of you. The Mother of God herself did nothing extraordinary, nothing that drew the admiration of the world, but she did perfectly what she had to do; that is precisely in what her incomparable merit consisted before God. Of course, to do well all things great or small, we must have mastery over the movements of the will and inclinations of the heart. Add to that a true interior self-denial and willingness to govern ourselves according to the urgings of grace, and we shall arrive at the holiness we are aiming at.

So, my dear daughters, behave according to this maxim: "Do well all that you do." If you persevere in this you will surely become holy. "She did everything well." There is your comfort in death, and the epitaph which should be engraved on our tombstones.

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## CHAPTER 24

### BEFORE LENT

*Prepare to spend Lent well!*

1. Dear Sisters, we are now offered a new stream of graces, of interior life, of holiness: it is Lent. Prepare to spend it well. It seems clear that it was instituted by the Apostles, in memory of our Lord's fast in the desert. In the Church's early days, the fast was very strict; one ate only once a day and that towards evening; and then taking only vegetables, herbs and fruit and, very occasionally, a little fish. Furthermore the fast included Sundays. The custom of making them an exception was brought in later, as a protest against some heretical views, adding instead the days from Ash Wednesday so making the forty days. Today the Church has mitigated the rigours of Lenten observance: a concession to the needs of the times and to the weakness of constitutions. For all that, we must not imagine that the Church was abolishing the obligation to do penance; on the contrary she continually invited the faithful to strict mortification by the solemn liturgy. So those of you who cannot undertake the fast must remember that they must be doubly assiduous in Zeal at their duties, pray with more fervour, and practise greater charity and obedience.

*Do not let these days of grace  
go by fruitlessly.*

2. Lent is a favourable time for everyone. It is good for souls who want to master their evil inclinations; good for those who long to plunge into the joys of the interior life, and it is favourable to all of us who want to undertake works of zeal to lead souls to God. In fact, how could one imagine that our Lord would be deaf to the entreaties of his beloved spouses, when he sees them kneeling humbly between the vestibule and the altar, offering themselves for sinners and forgetting themselves by seeking his glory in everything? Do not let these days of mercy and grace go by fruitlessly: we must remember it is a time of salvation and know how to draw profit from it. You can all become saints during the forty days of penance and blessings. One sister cannot fast but she can easily deprive herself at table of something not really necessary. Our Lenten austerities are not very rigorous, but we should keep more silence, as we are recommended during these holy days. I remind you that, at eight - thirty in the morning, the bell rings for silence until midday recreation: keep it faithfully. This is not merely a silence in words, we must also cut short wandering and useless thoughts, and avoid noise in our work and when closing doors. I remember that, when visiting Carmel, the Superior drew my attention to the door latches which were padded with cotton. "It is to prevent noise," she said: "Our holy mother recommended silence so strongly!"

*In silence one hears the mysterious demands of God.*

3. You will say that I am forever speaking of the need for silence. It's quite true. You see, time is so precious that those who waste a single moment in useless words do themselves and others great harm without realising it. The practice of silence will help us powerfully to those ends our zeal would attain. In silence we hear the mysterious demands of Divine Providence. By silence we shall reach the holiness so essential for each of us to contribute usefully to our works. In our Congregation, prayer, the interior life, solitude, should be our principal aim, although not the only one. It, however, will enable us to achieve the others, for none of you can work fruitfully for the salvation of souls, if she has not beforehand, drawn from silence and prayer, the light needed to lead souls to God.

*Try to forget yourselves.*

4. A wide prospect lies before us: I see many roads we must travel, so we must make a start without wasting time. Let us thank God for these days of quiet and meditation because, in recollecting ourselves, we shall increase our strength to use it eventually for God's glory. Yes, manifold works and weariness await us; we are offered apostolates, our Convents ask for more Sisters, several Bishops are renewing their requests for our presence in their dioceses. You would be grieved if I told you how many projects we are obliged to defer for the lack of Sisters. Once again, be recollected during these holy days so that you may pray much; be prepared, for we have great apostolates in view. Enter more

than ever into the spirit of our vocation. Don't ever seek yourselves, avoid speaking about yourselves, try to be forgotten and to forget yourselves: that will be the best penance you can do. Endeavour to suppress the spirit of frivolity in order to be interior religious, hidden in God. Yes, try in everything to glorify and please Him. You will hear the voice of God in your heart only by maintaining your inner solitude and by silence. In our vocation it is absolutely essential to make a habit of leading an interior life of self-denial. "I meditate on the Law of the Lord day and night. "(Ps. 1:2) says the Prophet; and we should be able to echo this. It is but another way of saying again that we should be silently occupied with God in our hearts.

*It is prayerful silence which gives us  
the wisdom and maturity we need.*

5. Silence is the delight and peace of a Community. Our houses, which have the most beautiful apostolates, are those which we know are most regular and quiet. Oh! If you knew what it is to disturb a servant of God engaged in spiritual combat! It is precisely then that the words of the Song of Songs are applicable! "Do not wake my beloved!" (S. of S. 2:7) Prayer is either a struggle or a sweet repose; and those who raise their voices in the corridors, or who are noisy in the Chapel, interrupt the union of God with his creatures. It is in silence that great thoughts are born and great deeds are accomplished. Oh, how I love those who achieve our works in silence and prayer! What a reward they will have! Pray for the souls entrusted to you, so that they may change their ways, and become worthy to come to the Paschal Banquet which the Church is preparing for them.

## CHAPTER 25

### THE FIRST DAY OF LENT

*We must carry on the war against sin  
which Jesus began on earth. (St.J.Eudes O. C. 1:173)*

1. Here we are, my dear daughters, at the first day of Lent. How shall we spend this holy season? Firstly, always united to the will of God. Those who are strong enough will fast and it will be the greater number; others who are weaker are dispensed. However, all without exception must these days lead a mortified life. Certainly it means a lot to those who can fast to keep to the spirit of the Church, but those who are prevented with good reason must not on that account be discouraged. They, too, may gain much merit. Let them be fervent in practising humility, charity, and other virtues: they can help the Sisters who are fasting. How pleasing to God they will be! Occasions to practise virtue will not be wanting, may they profit by them. And so everyone will be able to spend a holy Lent. Once again we recommend a scrupulous observance of silence. Nobody need be dispensed from that!

We wish the Sisters in charge of the groups and workrooms to be very firm in insisting on this. Remember that silence is prescribed for the whole morning and nobody may allow themselves a single useless word. Lent is a time for sacrifices, so be ready to welcome gladly all that come your way.

*By your fervour you can co-operate in saving souls.*

2. Our dear girls feel the sacrifices of these days devoted to fast and mortification. Be patient with them to gain them for our Lord. While in the world they probably never experienced the battles they have here. It is quite certain that the evil spirit torments them precisely because they want to change for the better. To fast and keep silence they must do themselves indescribable violence. Have compassion on them. These poor girls, slaves to their passions, hope for their deliverance because of your prayers and mortifications, for, says the Lord: "There is a kind of demon that can only be cast out by prayer and fasting." (Mk. 9:29) Oh, how these words should encourage us to spend Lent well! By your fervour you can cooperate in the salvation of so many souls! These are days of salvation and blessing, and the time, when works worth most for the glory of God, are usually conceived in the Congregation.

*You must not be upset about your poverty  
and weakness but remain in peace. (St J.Eudes O.C 10:522)*

3. Oh yes, dear Sisters, Lent which is now beginning will, I hope, be for us all a time of grace, resurrection and life. Looking round me I notice that most of you seem discouraged and tired. For some this may be due to overwork, for others - to the frequent injustices of persons who have opposed them; or by difficulties in the groups which tend to cause discouragement. Others have their particular crosses and their interior trials. In a word all of us have need to gather our inner resources together, to rest in God and unite ourselves more closely to Him; now is the time to do it.

*Get up; you still have a long way to go. (1 Kgs. 19:7)*

4. This morning, seeing you at prayer, I imagined an angel came to each of you and said, as to Elijah: "Get up and set out, for you still have a long way to go." The prophet under his tree, and left for a moment to his own weakness, was discouraged; he prayed for death. Beware of the same kind of depression, which, very reprehensible even in Elijah, would not do at all in a Sister of the Good Shepherd! The heroic Elijah, terror of kings, was frightened by a woman and threats. Fleeing from Jezebel's anger, he journeyed a whole day across the desert until he finally collapsed exhausted and fell asleep in the shade of a tree; twice an angel of the Lord woke him saying: "Get up and eat." The first time Elijah just looked round and seeing a loaf of bread baking in the ashes and ajar of water, he ate and drank and fell asleep again. The angel woke him a second time, saying again: "Get up and eat, because you still have a long way to go." Elijah got up, ate and drank and, so strengthened, he

walked for forty days and forty nights, avoiding his persecutors, until he reached Horeb, the "Mountain of God", where he hid in a cave. (1 Kgs. 19)

*You will travel courageously to the place shown you.*

5. The bread offered by the angel to the prophet, was a figure of the Holy Eucharist and foretold the health-giving properties of the Blessed Sacrament, for Elijah felt no need of food during his long journey of forty days and forty nights. The ashes in which the bread cooked prefigured the sorrows and humiliations that are sent us by Divine Providence to test our virtue; water signifies mortification and the purity necessary for the Lord's workers, for souls anxious to procure the glory of His Name. You too, my dear daughters, must get up and eat for you have a long way to go. I wouldn't be surprised if one of you wouldn't be, as it were, lying in the shade of a tree, believing that to die was about all she could do! On the contrary, see how the Lord is opening up to you your life's work and you will need fresh strength to cope with it. Some are called in the direction of England, others to Africa and America, others to Germany. What is quite sure is that several will leave for Lyons! This is why the angel of the Lord is saying to you: "Arise, eat and drink." And what is this drink that he wishes you to take? It is prayer, it is Holy Communion. Oh! how happy those who, until Easter, make their prayers and each Communion well! Their souls will have really eaten and drunk, they will have really rested in God. Then, full of a quite new energy, they will travel courageously towards the place that will be shown them. They will never fall discouraged by the wayside, they will never hide themselves, but will work eagerly in the spirit of their vocation.

*So long as God finds goodwill in us,  
He stretches out His hand to raise us.*

6. Soon after Elijah hid in the cave, the Lord, as though to rebuke him for abandoning his duty, called to him: "What are you doing there, Elijah? Why are you hiding in this cave? Come out now - go back by the road you came." Dear daughters, that is the way the Lord will reproach you if he sees you failing in zeal for your missions, if he finds you too afraid of disappointments and sufferings, too discouraged at the prospect of the world's persecution; if he sees that, through indifference, you should abandon the works of the Institute.

If anyone will have unfortunately fallen, let her get up again by means of the Sacraments. Go to Confession to heal the wounds of your soul and do not fail to go to Holy Communion. See the angel of the Lord at your side bringing this Divine food. We mustn't be too alarmed at committing a fault. Confession was instituted to cleanse our stains; we have only to acknowledge our sins with humility and contrition, and God forgives them. So long as he finds goodwill in us, He stretches out His hand to raise us. Remember the athletes of old. As you know they were severely abstemious so as not to become soft, and thus be beaten in the fierce contests they undertook. However, sometimes they fell but were not discouraged; up on their feet again, they fought on with renewed courage.

*It is for you correspond  
to the graces you -have received.*

7. What did Elijah do when the Lord rebuked him for his weakness? He left the cave at once, whatever it might cost him to do the will of God. Back on the road, he met Elisha, who was tilling the earth with a plough drawn by oxen. Inspired to make him a partner in his mission Elijah threw his mantle over him in order to pass on the prophetic spirit by clothing him with a prophet's cloak. Elisha instantly decided to follow him, only asking permission to go and embrace his father and mother. This request, prompted by filial affection did not displease Elijah, who answered in effect: "Go, then come back, because I have done all I can for you. It is for you now to correspond to the grace you have received. I have made known God's will for you: you know He wishes you to consecrate yourself to His service. Take care not to forget the great favour done to you."

My dear daughters, couldn't I say the same thing to each one of you? You have all been called to the service of God; you have all been solemnly clothed with a blest habit which is, as it were, a pledge of special favours; you have been instructed in your duties, you have been told what the Lord wants of you. Now it is for you to correspond to so many blessings.

*Happy are the poor in spirit. (Matt. 5:3)*

8. Elisha wanted his family and friends to know that the day he renounced all earthly goods was for him a day of great happiness: he took a pair of oxen, killed and roasted them on a fire made from his plough, and gave everyone a joyous feast. He then followed Elijah and served him, leaving family and goods, in order to answer the Lord's call to which he was always faithful. Each of you, my dear daughters, has experienced a joy like to the prophet's. Our young novices had a taste of it on their clothing day. Our virtuous professed Sisters, young and old, were at the height of happiness on their profession day. All of you know what it is to have made the sacrifice of your families and the goods you possessed. May the Spirit of God never withdraw from you; may you always be faithful to His call."

*I ask God with all my heart  
to make you die to yourselves...*

9. This morning ashes were put on your foreheads. In this holy ceremony, the Church wishes to remind us that we are dust and will return to dust. A timely reminder of death which you have been meditating on today.

You will remember that, on your Profession day having received the silver heart with its image of Mary and the Good Shepherd to be worn day and night, and after the black veil was placed on your head as a sign of your death to the world, the Officiant, in the name of the Church, addressed these words to you: "Now, Sister, you are dead to the world and to yourself to live alone in God." Then, to show your consent to these sentiments, you prostrated in the form of a cross and were covered with a pall. The Libera was then sung and you were aspersed with Holy Water as are the dead. Then, with a change of voice, the Officiant summoned you, saying: "Rise, Sister, leave the shadow of death, clothe yourself with the Light of Life, Jesus Christ .....

There are two kinds of death, beloved daughters, natural death and interior, spiritual death, just as there are two kinds of life: the life of nature and the life of grace - our inward life and our life in God. Natural death we shall never ask for, because we urgently need all of you to go on living for the work of the Institute. But as for interior death, I ask God with all my heart to make you die to yourselves so that He may live in you. Oh, yes, die this death which will give you life; die to your senses, your affections, your judgement and to your own will: in a word, die to all in you that is not of God. Work hard to subdue your fallen nature in order to vivify the life of Grace.

*Yield to the gentle wind of Divine grace:  
it will carry you safely to harbour.*

10. Notice that all the saints have worked perseveringly to mortify their fallen nature by going against their passions. Listen to the Apostle Paul: "I die every day." (1 Cor. 15:31) and as though that were not enough he adds: "I die each moment." (cf. 2 Cor. 4:11) wishing us to understand that we must ceaselessly die to ourselves so as to live only in God. A person dead to herself does not let any repugnance stop her, she does not even feel it, so little is she dominated by her lower nature. Notice that nobody is so against the will of others as those who are wedded to their own! And how will you achieve this death which must be the aim of all your efforts? The great secret in the art of dying to self is never to impede the workings of grace, to allow oneself to be wholly governed by God. Now, it is God himself who, by the prescriptions of our Holy Rule and by the voice of your Superiors, takes you by the hand and guides you as one does a child. Allow yourself to be led by this friendly and kindly hand, without any resistance; yield to the gentle wind of Divine grace and be sure it will carry you safely to harbour.

*For example, when it is cold, don't grumble,  
be sure it is less cold here than it is  
hot in Purgatory!*

11. St. Francis de Sales said that we can be sure of dying to ourselves if we do only the will of God in all our actions. So it is not necessary, as you may perhaps imagine, to undertake great austerities. We are continually faced with a thousand others, which are some times more meritorious,

because they cost nature more. For example, at recreation you are tempted to give way to immoderate laughter, check yourself! During the day, instead of sticking to your work, you suddenly fancy walking about without necessity; stay quietly where you are. In the refectory, don't deprive yourself of food, on the contrary take what is given you, but that last tasty morsel - leave it! You have fruit for dessert, take half of it. You are given coarse linen, don't complain. It is in these and a hundred other ways that you can die to yourself.

*Leave God free to act..*

12. Perhaps you say to yourself: "I do want to despoil myself, to die to myself," but if we really examine ourselves we shall see that we want to do it our way instead of according to God's will. So he in His great mercy, puts His hand on us, strikes, prunes, removes everything that prevents us living for Him alone. So with humility and submission, let us leave Him free to act. If you are generous enough to allow yourself to be crucified like our dear Lord, to die with him, to bury your poor human nature in the tomb, like Him you will leave it glorious to be born again to divine life. This begins here on earth in the mysterious darkness of Faith and will be completed in the splendour of glory, when we shall be able to say with truth: it is not we who live but God who lives in us.

## CHAPTER 26

### THE EVE OF THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

*Trust in the Blessed Virgin:  
she is the Superior of the Institute.*

1. The feast we shall celebrate tomorrow, dear daughters, is perhaps the one that should give most joy to the faithful servants of Mary, for on this happy day the gentle virgin, in becoming Mother of God, became at that moment our Mother. With what wonder this feast fills our hearts as we ponder on the infinite selfabasement of the Lord who comes down from Heaven to take flesh in His Mother's womb! This mystery took place at midnight while Mary was at prayer; and in memory of this mysterious hour of our salvation, Carmelites make an hour's prayer at Midnight each year on this Feast. Those who lament their inability to meditate, then ask for this gift and it is given to them.

*By a united chorus of prayer,  
our desires become reality!*

2. Now, my dear daughters, I am going to give joy to your hearts and excite in them an even greater love and gratitude towards Mary. Tomorrow, the feast of the Annunciation our Convent in London will really be founded. Tomorrow, our Sisters will take possession of a house and will receive penitents and children. One can say that this longed-for foundation has at last taken flesh, but it will need us and we must not abandon it, because a child in its mother's womb or a new born child is far from able to walk alone. I cannot tell you how pleased I am that this happy event has taken place on such a beautiful day. The Blessed Virgin is really the foundress of London. Good St. Joseph has also had a hand in this great work; we have not prayed to him in vain. However, he wants his dear spouse to have all the honour, and tomorrow he will offer her London as a bouquet. I believe, too, that St. Euphrasia bestirred herself - I'm sure she will have spoken to God about London, and we owe the accomplishment of our desires to this united chorus of prayer. So as to draw down Mary's protection more and more, tomorrow we shall begin a novena of processions in honour of our Lady of Sorrows to end on that feast day. Nothing can cost too dearly for a mission as sublime as London and I must admit that all our sacrifices for its success seem a mere nothing compared to the fruits we expect from it. A monastery in a Kingdom of heretics, lost souls brought back to the truth, what other conquest could give us greater joy?



**CHAPTER 27**  
**ON THE AFRICAN MISSION BEGUN**  
**1st. May 1843**

*Be still and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations. (Ps. 46: 10)*

1. More than fourteen centuries ago, my dear daughters, our father, St. Augustine composed the rule we observe and which is the admiration of the Church. It is centuries since a cloistered order entered Africa; since those times, the sound of the Church's chants has not been heard. It is now given to us to bring them back to this once celebrated land. The good daughters of St. Vincent de Paul and those of Christian Doctrine have set foot on that distant coast, but their admirable communities are not cloistered nor do they sing the Office. So the better part is kept for you. Your departure for that land makes our hearts leap for joy!

*Remember your leaders who preached  
the Word of God to you ... imitate their faith. (Heb. 13:7)*

2. Four Latin Doctors have enriched the Church with their genius, and St. Augustine is the one among them who has written the most and written the best. What sweetness, what strength in his words! Nothing can compare with the beauty of his works. Read his holy Rule and note the warmth of expression. To quote just the first Chapter: "Before all things love God and then your neighbour." How this great saint loved God! And how he will now rejoice over our mission! One cannot doubt his powerful prayers have contributed much to this great enterprise. The inhabitants of those regions, how ever uncivilized they may be, cherish, even today, the memory of the Saint. Above all, they remember his love for souls. It is told in his life that, wishing to found a community at Hippo, he shared his plans for this project, adding: "Do my people want it?" And as they clapped their hands in approval he said: "I am pleased - the voice of the people is the voice of God." Hippo was destroyed but the site of his tomb is held in veneration, and Mgr. Dupuch is building a little chapel on the spot which has become a place of pilgrimage, not only for Catholics but for Arabs as well. You will see these places, and also where that marvellous book, the Confessions of St. Augustine was composed. And you will recall that in the fourth century a great number of Religious strove under the rule of this renowned Saint. I was thinking last night and again this morning that we shall be reviving the primitive fervour of the African Church. We know that, in general, you will be well received. The Arabs and the Bedouins like white, and your religious habit will merit their respect. You will have many penitents and many souls to save.

*Children of miracles!*

3. What extraordinary circumstances are in this foundation! Mgr. Dupuch, Bishop of Algiers, who is asking for us, told me that, while celebrating Mass in St. Philomena's Chapel, the saint intimated that in our Congregation he would find the consecrated Virgins suitable for the apostolate he wanted to establish in Algeria. These words tormented him, and it is certainly under St. Philomena's protection that he achieved his objective, in spite of Satan's efforts. Here is another happening; our Bishop found that, in spite of himself, he was obliged to hasten the foundation. Yesterday morning, a trustworthy messenger went to the Bishop's house to get the answer we needed from his Lordship. "Say to your good Superior that I haven't the time to write even a line: tell her to make the nominations and I'll come round this evening to confirm them." Another thing: yesterday we needed five hundred francs more for the Sisters' fare. We did not know where to find them, when quite unexpectedly someone gave them to us. My dear daughters, do you wish to obtain more and more of such graces? Always observe our Holy Rules, sing the Office as is laid down and remember these words of St. Augustine: "Do not spoil the beauty of your chants by the discord of your life."

*All the good you have  
comes from the great mercy of God,  
without any merit on your part.*

4. Let us be humble as he was. When, before his conversion, he went to seek an interview with St. Ambrose, sometimes he had to wait; but far from being discouraged he considered himself

unworthy to disturb this venerable bishop. This humility made St. Ambrose foresee that Augustine would be a great saint. Since then these two bright lights have shone together in the Church. Later, St. Augustine received letters from St. Jerome who, in his distant desert, had allowed himself to be prejudiced against the former and wrote: "Because you are a priest, because you are clever, because you are a Bishop, you think you are better than your elders: however, understand that the old oxen have never worked harder." And St. Augustine replied: "Oh! for the wings of a dove! I would fly to you, my father in the faith." Such is the humility of the Saints. They rival each other in self-abasement. St. Peter greeted St. Paul: "I salute you, Apostle of Nations." St. Paul replied: "I salute you, foundation stone of the Church and Father of all people."

*You are Missionaries and must have  
an apostolic spirit.*

5. Be obedient, dear daughters; remember that when you have been named to leave, this is what you are being told: Daughter of Obedience, go to Africa, go by Obedience, and stay by Obedience. Oh, I most earnestly ask you never to tire of this mission, whatever difficulties you may encounter; besides, be sure that Africa will respect you and that Heaven will bless you. But, once again, be humble and obedient like St. Augustine.

## CHAPTER 28

### AFTER THE SECOND JOURNEY TO ROME

*Jesus traced her way .....(Hymn to S. M. E.)*

1. I am pleased to say, my dear daughters, that since leaving the Mother House for Rome, we have received continual favours from Divine Providence.

We stayed at Le Mans with the Visitation Sisters where we had a warm welcome. During a joyous recreation with the Community an old mother came in and without any preamble said: "Dear Mother, you have founded many works up to now; but you are not yet half way along the road traced out for you." I looked at her in astonishment as did all the Sisters.

*I must be about my Father's business (Lk. 2:49)*

2. From Paris, as we told you, graces rained down on us. We consider our meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio as a favour, without which our business in Rome would have certainly gone less well. I must tell you that, by mistake, we were told that the Bishop of Nice was in Paris. So we wrote to him, asking for an audience. Our request being granted we went to see his Lordship. On arriving at the address given to us we asked in vain for the Bishop; nobody knew him, nobody had seen him, nobody had heard of him. We were told, however, that nearby in the college lived the Bishop of Nicea, a Papal Nuncio. Hearing the name 'Nicea' we understood the mistake, but saying nothing we asked to be shown in, and found the Nuncio expecting us. He had received the letter addressed to the Bishop of Nice and never doubted it was for him.

He received us as his daughters. We said nothing of our mistake, and spoke to him of our Sisters in Rome, and on several important matters, which he listened to with interest. His Excellency was on the point of leaving for the Holy City where he arrived before us and helped us with his protection.

Several days later we were due to leave for Rome: our seats were booked in the diligence, but as I was getting into the carriage I felt so ill that I realised I could not travel. The Superior of Paris took my place as far as Marseille and at just that moment Mgr. de Fortin Jansen, former Bishop of Nancy, was announced. His Lordship spoke to us about an important mission - a foundation in China. This meant nothing less than promising him five Religious for the work; and all the Sisters in Paris vied with one another in offering themselves.

*And so we went to Rome. (Acts 28:14)*

3. At last we left for Rome. During the sea passage we were fortunate to be with several good people, of whom four were Jesuit Fathers who were going to India and perhaps to martyrdom. We had delightful talks: it was a question of who spoke most eagerly of gaining souls for God. You know that Monsieur Eugene Boré stayed with us as far as Rome. Nothing can convey the spiritual devotion of this young man.

When we landed at Civita-Vecchia, the Consuls of France and Austria presented themselves, overwhelming us with kind attentions until we were embarrassed. There was nothing the Consul of Austria, above all, did not do for us, as well as M. Bussière (1) who took us to Rome in his carriage, to Rome, the object of all our thoughts and desires.

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1. M. Bussière gave the medal of our Lady to Alphonse Ratisbon.

*In St. Peter's Basilica above all, I entreated  
the First Shepherd to protect you all.*

4. One could not count the graces granted us in the holy city. What precious audiences with his Holiness Gregory XVI, what rich blessings for the whole Congregation! How the head of the Church loves the Congregation, and how close to his heart you are!

Praying in the principal Churches of Rome I thought of you all, begged for you a zeal without limits, and a tender charity for our penitents: in a word, all the virtues we need in our holy Vocation. In St. Peter's Basilica above all, I entreated the First Shepherd of the Church to protect you and the whole Congregation. There is nothing like the devotion one feels on entering St. Peter's. What good fortune for those who live here, in this place soaked by the blood of martyrs, where their sacred relics lie.

*You are privileged children of God  
and of the Church.*

5. What can I tell about outhouses in Rome, where I found such love for the Institute! Zeal for souls consumes our Sisters. The devout Princess Doria, foundress of the Convent of La Lauretana, can refuse nothing to the Superior. We joked with the latter about how small the house was; even, we said, the kitchens in the Doria palace were bigger than our choir. Roused to action she spoke to the Princess and the next day workmen came to enlarge the Sisters' choir and to build dormitories. We would like to tell you of all the graces God has given, but I cannot do so in one day. Our recreations, conferences and chapters will recall them continually, for my soul is submerged in such great mercy. You must remember all your lives, be loved daughters, that you are privileged children of God and of the Church; and endeavour to correspond wholeheartedly with the plans of Divine Providence for our Congregation.

When we left Rome we found on board several members of the Doria family, and on the same boat were Prince Borghese and the dear little Princess Agnes, a charming child.

## CHAPTER 29

### ON RETURNING FROM ROME

*Blessed are those who walk  
in the light of your presence, O God. (Ps. 88:16)*

1. Wherever I have been, I have reminded our Sisters of our Venerable Father Eudes' words: "They must use their mind and heart, their care and their industry, to become worthy helpers and collaborators of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the work of the salvation of souls bought at the price of His blood."

We must study these words in depth, my dear daughters, and put them into practice. I can never thank God enough for the grace of having visited our houses in the south. I am now asking for the favour of setting off again, once winter is over, to visit those in the North. And on my return, if God so wishes, I shall willingly sing my Nunc Dimittis. In our convents I have found the utmost docility. There were several things to correct, but where there was failure it was due to inexperience. Some sisters said: "We were so young when we were sent here, but we are ready to do all you wish, all you tell us." And indeed everything has been put right.

Religious perfection does not mean that we have no shortcomings, that we never commit faults, it consists rather in correcting those once aware of them.

*Beware of prejudice; use right judgement.*

2. One thing we must guard against is becoming prejudiced against one or other of our convents, or against any country. Wherever you go, do your best to keep the customs and practices of the Mother House. Nevertheless use right judgement and understand that, in certain matters, one must adapt to local circumstances, doing the best one can and remembering that, in the spirit of our vocation, we must be "all things to all men." (1 Cor. 9:22) Let me give you an example showing how necessary it is to follow that advice. In one of our Roman houses, they had kept to French food and several other customs contrary to Italian usage. Well, the penitents could not get used to this, and it was difficult to convert them. In the other house, I found Italian food, and saw that the penitents were contented, fond of their Mothers who in this way led them more easily to God.

Your Rule should be above all your guide, your star, and as to the customs we have here, your dearest wish will be to preserve them as far as possible.

We wish all our convents to have the same letter stamp as the Mother House. I would also like the refectories to be the same; that if possible the plates and bowls be of pewter. One of our Superiors said: "Silver plate is suitable for the nobility; pewter dishes are better for Religious. Let's leave modern table ware to the world." However, St. Augustine allowed spoons to be of silver for greater cleanliness.

*Our Lord intends each of you to do a lot of good.*

3. More than ever are we going to comfort and encourage our Sisters in the foundations. They are so good! Take care never to say a single word which could sadden them, be it ever so slightly. And a letter which could sadden them in any way must never leave this house; if this misfortune ever happens, I publicly protest that I would never have seen that letter. The Mother House could never do enough to help these good sisters. To uphold them we shall send them Sisters full of zeal, good mistresses of penitents, for that is one of the important needs in a Good Shepherd Convent. When, in our houses, there is a good Superior, a devoted Assistant who helps the Superior in every way, a true mistress of penitents seconded by a Sister who is able in the workrooms, that house will do well. And to be useful in the houses to which you are sent, you must each perfect yourselves in your special employment. For example, let the Sister who has little aptitude for study specialize in dressmaking, embroidery, mending, ironing and so on, and know how to prepare and manage the work. Keep your employment in perfect order whatever it may be. Our Lord intends each of you to do a lot of good. Be glad and thank Him and always keep up your courage.

*One cannot be totally dedicated without the spirit of the cross.*

4. This morning, during meditation, I thought of St. Vincent de Paul offering an abandoned child to the ladies who helped him in his good works and who had become discouraged: "Now, come, come, ladies," said he, "do you want to leave this poor child to die? Do you want to leave this poor little creature without help and without Baptism?" And all the ladies, once again filled with zeal, promised him to support the work even at the cost of their lives. My dear daughters, I offer you our thirty houses. (1) Without your zeal, selfsacrifice and devotedness they couldn't keep going. So you see what you must do. I have no doubt that our houses will never lack necessities; I am quite sure that they can count on heaven's protection, but I cannot believe that they can continue without Sisters who are totally dedicated, in fact I see it as an impossibility. One cannot be totally dedicated without the spirit of the cross, a love of the cross. Remember dear daughters, that we are founded on Calvary.

If St. Vincent de Paul's Parisian Ladies had our works put into their hands what would they have said, what would they have done? Now, imagine if you can, the immense good that you are called to do; your mind's eye could not take it in.

When we close the eyes of our dear penitents in death what a consolation to think they will open them to the unimaginable beauties of Heaven! Generally they all leave this life with total abandonment and most edifyingly! My dear daughters, you who have the merit of helping them to their salvation will be rewarded in eternity.

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1. In 1843 there were only thirty houses.

## CHAPTER 30

### AFTER VISITING SEVERAL CONVENTS

*By your sensitivity, your love,  
you will become holier.*

1. During my recent travels, my dear daughters, what consolations I experienced in seeing the perfect order reigning in our houses, the holy Rule observed in all its force, and the charity, unity and great love of all our Sisters for this dear Mother House; they gladly acknowledge it to be the source and support of the foundations!

Yes, how they love the Mother House in the foundations! I did not realise how much, until I saw it for myself. I bring you a thousand thanks from your Sisters who are encouraged in their labours by your tender charity for them. One could say that they are nourished by the links they have with the Mother House in receiving your affectionate letters. Thanks especially to those whose charge it is to give them this consolation. Never fail to show great warmheartedness towards the houses of the Institute, above all to those who are the poorest, helping them in every possible way; by this sensitivity, this love, you will become holier. When you write to our Sisters, don't make it just a few words, some meaningless lines which leave an empty feeling in the heart. Go into little details, a proof that you are interested in everything. Writing to houses that have more to endure, sympathise and try to lift their hearts. You should be even more tender, more affectionate towards our humbler foundations, we must go to them with the same joy as to the more prosperous ones.

*The material resources of the Congregation  
are at the service of our missions. (Const. 135)*

2. In establishing a house, care must be taken not to be trapped in a blind alley, so to speak, where it is impossible to do any good. As always, we must be guided by a humble providence, and by a spirit of perfect obedience to those who speak to us in the name of God.

I must admit, dear daughters, that one of the things that haunt me night and day is the problem of maintaining our poor houses. When I know that one of our dear communities suffers want, I would willingly say with Mother de Chantal: "My heart is so grieved thinking of our Sisters' dire straits, that I would like to be able to sell myself to give them some help."

This saint's love for her daughters was really extraordinary and our Lord proved it even by miracles. Thus, when the heart of this great foundress, brought from Moulins to Lyons, was borne into the midst of the Community, it was seen to tremble several times; this was taken as a sign of the love this saintly mother had for her religious family.

*When our Sisters visit, let us make much of them.*

3. Above all, be very hospitable to our Sisters travelling, welcome them cordially. See how the apostle Paul instilled the practice of fraternal hospitality into the first believers: "I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, deaconess of the Church in Corinth - welcome her in the Lord's name, as one should welcome the saints; help her in all needs; she deserves this for she has helped many of us and especially myself. (Rom. 16:13) Again writing to Corinth he said: "I urge you to reverence those who, by their sufferings and work have contributed to God's work." (1 Cor. 16:16) And yet again: "They have comforted my heart as well as yours." (1 Cor. 16:18) In fact, dearest Sisters, when I see you give such a welcome to our sisters you, too, comfort my heart.

"Practice hospitality to everyone." (1 pet. 4:9) These words are meant for us as well, since Charity is the essence of our vocation.

One could say that the Mother House is like the home of an affectionate grandmother, when all the children and grand-children, who visit her, are made much of. When our Sisters come we should extend our care to them to the smallest details; we must see they rest, encourage them, wash

their clothes, cheer them up, showing the greatest friendliness, seasoned with humility and charity. Speak freely with our Sisters who come with such joy; show how pleased you are to have them here.

*Let no-one surpass you in fraternal love!*

4. We must behave in such a way that what is recorded in Holy Scripture may be true of us: "All the company were of one heart and mind, and nobody thought that what he had was for himself only: everything was in common among them." (Acts 4:32) The customs of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon reflect the spirit of the old Patriarchs. When they deal with travellers they show them such deference, above all for priests and religious, that it is impossible to describe the respect and attention with which they shower them. Among other things, they give them perfumes, the freshest milk, the best products, the richest cream, the finest cheeses, the most luscious fruit; they kiss their hands, they summon the family with all the children to greet them and ask for their blessing. They are honoured to help them mount their horses, touch their clothing with veneration, and when visitors leave, their hosts follow them with their eyes, wave to them, and accompany them with their good wishes. Let it never be said, dear daughters, that the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon surpass you in the practice of fraternal love!

*See how the Saints act...*

5. Abbot Apollonious, superior of several monasteries in the Thebaid, often told his Religious that visiting brothers should be treated with veneration. I always read with fresh pleasure what is told in the life of St. Anthony. This great saint, seeing how often his disciples came to see him, set to work cultivating a few vegetables, and to gathering fruit so as to give them something extra when they visited. It was a real feast day when the saint welcomed his sons; he sent all of them home contented, and he, himself, was happy to have refreshed and comforted them. That is how saints act. Let us learn from them to do the same. We must remember to have but one heart and one mind.

*How these Christians love one another!*

6. In general, seculars think Religious unhappy and bitter, that they live together without affection. No, indeed, dearest daughters, you can witness to the contrary. Gathered together here from many countries, we are so many loving Sisters, and we know how much we feel it when we have to separate. And no-one will blame us, if at the moment of parting, we show this by shedding a few tears. St. Paul himself, who had borne with courage chains, scourgings and imprisonment was moved to the depths of his soul when he saw the believers shedding tears as he left them.

However obedient, however detached were St. Teresa's daughters, they also wept when they had to part. When St. Bernard was on a journey and received letters from the brethren who bewailed his absence, he replied: "You tell me that you miss me very much; I beg you to think how much it must cost me to be far from you. The measure of privation is not equal between you and me, for it is quite different for a whole group of people to be deprived of one of their number than for this single person to be deprived of all the members of the Community."

*We must always be rekindling our first fervour.*

7. My dear daughters, keep alive in your hearts your love for your Sisters, your affection for the Mother House. Is not Angers the cradle of your religious childhood so should it not have a central place in your hearts? Yes, and its memory should be ineffaceable. Of course it is not the walls that we ask you to love, but it is the Spirit of regularity, zeal, devotion and charity reigning here that must be imitated.

Now you are filled with the highest ideals; it must not happen that after several years they become dim, and that a certain egoism takes over your hearts, which will lead you off the right road you are on now. If you live this way, you will become lost.



## CHAPTER 31

### AFTER THE JOURNEY TO BAVARIA

*Good Lord, I thank you;  
Blessed be Your Name. (Julian of Norwich)*

1. My dear daughters, several times we have quoted King David's words: "How wonderful is God in his saints and in His works!" (Ps. 67: 36) Today, we have more than ever reason to repeat: "O my God how wonderful you are in your work!" In our various foundations we have seen so much virtue, so much devotedness, such regularity, that we are quite enraptured in the Lord! If we enjoy describing those magnificent Churches raised to the glory of the thrice-holy God, how much more delightful it is to speak with you about the living and invisible sanctuaries of the Divinity - souls! We have witnessed the attachment of the Sisters to the Mother House whose least recommendations are like strict orders for them. We have seen their numerous family-groups which are fervent and blessed by our Lord, and among them were sixty newly baptised persons. In fact, I venture to say, that each of our houses is a favoured garden of the Lord on which He lets fall gentle and fruitful showers.

*How great Thou art!*

2. Oh, who could describe the Lord's goodness to us! His benefactions are continual and so it is for us to thank Him ceaselessly, our hearts melting with love and gratitude for Him. As for me, for a long time I can only make my prayer on the graces God wills to give our Congregation. And could we fail to ponder on the particular attentions lavished on us by His fatherly love? The hymn of gratitude must always re-echo among us. Never receive a kindness from our Lord without thanking Him for it! That is the way to receive still more favours, because God loves and blesses grateful hearts. Often thank Him for the priceless gift of your vocation! Would that we could shout aloud such a grace in every language! How true that "our portion has fallen on good ground!" (Ps. 16:15) God has made himself our inheritance even in this life.

*Open our hearts to you, Mighty Spirit  
And speedily bear us to haven in God. (cf. S. A. H.)*

3. But it is not enough to admire the greatness of our Vocation; you must become worthy of it for as the Apostle says: "We must beware of receiving God's grace in vain." (2 Cor. 6:1) Raise your soul to the heights of the Lord's call to you; the way you think, the way you judge, the way you love should be as the saints do, and indeed as Jesus himself. You must not be content with ordinary and common virtue, but strive towards a high degree of perfection. Does it seem that it is enough for you to carry out the duties assigned to you, to avoid grave sin, and to remain as it were becalmed without advancing or retreating? Oh! No! This kind of life, without any progress strongly resembles sleep! Look at a ship sailing on the high seas; if the wind which drives it forward should drop, it progresses with difficulty and even fails to move at all. It is like that with our soul when it is content with an unexacting interior life. It must be kept active, that is, the wind of fervour and charity must always impel us towards the Lord. Don't let us ever stop nor even slow down.

*Make every effort to live in peace with men  
and to be holy. (Heb. 12:14)*

4. Keep these words of our Lord alive in your mind: "May he who is just become more just, and he who is holy become even more holy." (Apoc. 22:11) And this: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48)

Assuredly, my dear daughters, we cannot become perfect as God himself is perfect, because he is infinite in His perfections; what our Lord wishes us to understand by these words is that we must tend without ceasing to become holy and ever closer to God. And I am happy to say this is what our good Sisters out on the battlefield are doing. Their zeal in doing the work of God and in pursuing their own sanctification really comforts my heart and inspires me to greater fervour myself.

*Paul thanked God and was encouraged. (Acts 28:15)*

5. This recent visit also taught me more than I could have ever learnt in my ten years here. I could never have believed that our foundations should have made such rapid progress, nor that the whole institute has moved on so much, as though forging ahead with giant steps, accompanied by a guiding light from above. What can we make of all that? We may infer that we are on the right road, dare I say to holiness? In your letters you told me that our Sisters lately deceased, died the death of saints and have gone to swell the Church triumphant. Let us hope that we who are fighting in the Church Militant may one day join them, where they have arrived. Meanwhile, let us keep going with courage, using the great advantages afforded by the wonderful religious life of our Institute.

Oh! May we always find in this Blessed Congregation, our rest and shelter! We shall pass the night of our exile here until the sunrise in our true homeland.

## CHAPTER 32

### ON THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST NEGRESSES

*You and the foreigners among you shall rejoice! (Dent. 26:11)*

1. My dear daughters, on our way to Rome as we were going uphill we had to get out of the diligence to lighten the vehicle. We then met a shepherd-boy guarding his flock which was made up of black and white sheep. I thought, "How happy you are, little shepherd, to have white and black sheep! I have lots of white ones but it is black ones that are lacking." These black sheep, which for many years I have longed for, are the unfortunate negresses snatched from their parents by brutal hands, or whose parents have sold them for a pittance. These cruel traders then take them in chains to Cairo, Alexandria or other cities, and expose the poor children in the market places for sale to whoever will pay the most. It frequently happens that these children, too ill or too weak to keep up with the others, are abandoned in woods or ravines. There they die of hunger or fall prey to wild animals. How often, in Noirmoutier, one heard tell of the slave trade, this abominable traffic. How many times heart rending stories were re-told of the slave ships where the poor blacks were crowded together with food that was hardly sufficient to keep them from dying of hunger. For the slightest fault their pitiless master would have them beaten. These stories pierced my heart! What a joy for all of us to be able to break the chains of these ill-fated children! At least we shall have, I hope, the happiness of saving some of them.

M. Olivieri, a Genoese priest has written to say that he will soon be here, that his elderly housekeeper, Nina, who has cared for the little blacks en route, will accompany them to Angers. What care we shall take of them! How thoughtfully we shall instruct them! My soul thrills at the thought of Ethiopians, Nubians, Abyssinians, receiving the white robe of Baptism. Who knows? Perhaps one day the Good Shepherd will go and pitch its tent on the banks of the Nile and among primitive peoples!

Oh! What a lovely feast we shall celebrate when the living water flows on the heads of these young negresses! What a consolation for us when they open their eyes to the truths of the Faith! We shall take part in Heaven's feast and the joy of the Church when she sees the number of her children increase! How tender she is to all who come to her, with what kindness she welcomes unbelievers who come to her arms! Lately some Japanese arrived in Rome. The Pope would not have a Cardinal baptise them. He did it himself. Happy are we to be irrevocably in the Church's bosom. Never cease thanking God for such a grace.

## CHAPTER 33

### LETTER FROM CARDINAL MASTAI ARCHBISHOP OF IMOLA (the future Pope Pius IX)

My beloved daughters, I am going to read a letter received this morning, which will bring you great joy. It is from His Eminence, Cardinal Mastai, Archbishop of Imola, giving us news of the safe arrival there of our Sisters.

Very Reverend Mother General,

You should by now have received news from your dear daughters of their happy arrival here, but it is fight that I should confirm this event. At the same time I want to say what a consolation it is for me to be enriched by this little group of consecrated virgins who, in a few days, will begin their mission of saving so many lost sheep. I am sure that, with God's grace, they will lead them to the sheepfold of the Prince of Pastors, Jesus Christ. Praise forever be to the Lord of mercy. I beg you also, Reverend Mother to accept the assurance of my profound gratitude. It is a pleasure to have the Sisters with me in the palace. I have every reason to thank the Lord who holds the hearts of men in his hands; it seems to me Reverend Mother, that he has placed your daughters in His own Heart.

I shall not fail to help them in their needs; and it is with this desire that I am happy to assure you of my sincere esteem.

Your Reverence's attached Servant,

J.M. Cardinal Mastai, Archbishop.  
Imola, 14th September, 1845.

We may well say, dear sisters, that, for the sake of the souls we try to bring back to Him, the Lord's arrows of grace and love wing their way to us, in the blessings He grants to our work. In heaven, He is storing unimaginable happiness and love for all those who will have worked for His glory. Isn't it true that even though we may often have to suffer humiliations, not one of us received in the world so much honour as we receive because we are Religious? And just because of that, shouldn't we always be very humble and small interiorly? God wills to fill the high and mighty with zeal and goodwill towards our houses. He has heard our prayers for good subjects according to His Heart, and He has given us many. Thankful for these graces, we must give pleasure to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, endeavouring to grow in holiness, and doing everything with fervour and love. Let us pray and work for the salvation of souls and never forget that our life must be totally committed to that. If we worked for any other end, we would fail in our vocation, not understanding its sublimity, and possessing neither its spirit nor love.

## CHAPTER 34

### OUR LITTLE PRISONERS

*Be all love, all charity for souls.*

I. I am so happy to be with you again, dear Sisters, I would have liked all of you to be at Nazareth to welcome the contingent of young prisoners. (1) The diligence from Rennes was late and they arrived only at ten o'clock in the evening. At first they seemed woebegone and frightened, but once in front of the fire of vine branches, which crackled in the big kitchen chimney, our little birds began to chirp! We served them a nice, hot soup, meat and wine etc. etc.. Then their poor hearts opened: it was a long time since they had enjoyed such a banquet!

The next day, another surprise! The prison uniforms were replaced by the dresses you made so eagerly and with such love. They stared at each other unable to grasp such a transformation. When they were allowed to run about in part of the garden, "Aren't we in prison any longer?", one of them asked. "Children, you are at the Good Shepherd to learn to love and serve God, and also to be trained to work, so that later on you can help your families." "Thank you, sister." "You mustn't say that", corrected one of the older ones: "Here, they are Mothers." And this rebuke was accompanied by an energetic nudge! So you see, we must be real Mothers, watchful shepherdesses in order to lead this new flock. The task will be difficult, but the reward immense! The town is very interested in our work for young prisoners. Our Bishop is pleased about it. His Lordship has promised to offer Mass at Nazareth.

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1. Seventy-five prisoners in two groups were transferred from Rennes to Nazareth on the 2nd and 3rd May, 1853. On the 1st May, 1854, one hundred arrived from Clairvaux.

*Later on.*

*Let fall on me some fruit from the Tree of Thy passion. (Gallic)*

2. For a long time I have noticed that each feast of the Good Shepherd brings a fresh outpouring of grace. We realise the truth of the maxim quoted by our good Superiors of Tours: "Grace is the fruit of the Cross. Only those who reach the summit of this tree can gather it." Last week we had heavy crosses, but after suffering comes consolation. First I must tell you that His Lordship celebrated Mass yesterday at Nazareth, and a good number of the children had the joy of receiving from his hand the Lord, who entered their hearts for the first time. The Sacrament of Confirmation followed this ceremony. More than one hundred girls were equipped with the weapons to defend themselves from the assaults of Satan. The good dispositions of this dear flock give us great joy. They are, on the whole, devout and hard-working. Some of them reveal delightful characteristics. As a reward for diligence many of them ask permission to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Aren't these real consolations? Pray constantly, dear Sisters, that God may increasingly touch the hearts of these young prisoners now in our care.

## CHAPTER 35

### THE SPREAD OF OUR INSTITUTE

*A closely united family...*

1. "Blessed are you who see what you see; blessed Those who hear what you hear."

Doesn't it seem to you, dear daughters, that these words are addressed to you as you experience the various good works of our Institute? Surely God will, indeed, bless our feeble efforts abundantly.

In the circulars we receive, a delightful panorama unfolds: a family whose members scattered over many different countries, are closely united in the bonds of true love; and who are all aiming at the same object - the spiritual regeneration of sheep who were wandering far from the Good Shepherd's fold.

I would like to point out to you that the rapid growth of our Institute in such a short time, is due only to the special blessings of holy Church in issuing the Brief for the erection of the Generalate. Our Holy Father, Pope Gregory XVI, used these words: "We uphold it with all the power of our Authority." The tiny grain of mustard seed, first sown in French soil, and which sprouted only in a few corners of the earth, suddenly developed rapidly and now the little shrub has become a great tree, stretching its branches to the four quarters of the globe, welcoming thousands of souls looking for a place of safety in its protective -shade. His Holiness, Pope Pius IX several times has said to our Sisters: "The work of the Good Shepherd is the work of my heart." And the Holy Pontiff has given a proof of his fatherly interest by the decree of July 21 1st, 1855, establishing Provinces in the Congregation.

Forget yourselves...

2. So you see that it is because of the blessings of the Church and her Head that we make progress, enabling us to take new steps day by day. Like a general who, to rouse his soldiers' courage, reminds them of trophies already won, shows them the towns to conquer and the battles to be won, so I remind you of apostolates offered to you and souls who call to you for help! Oh, yes, dear daughters, fight for the good cause; forget yourselves so as to be totally committed to the Congregation which means everything to you. You know very well that without sacrifice and selfdenial you can do no good, whereas with zeal and devotedness you will succeed in the most difficult apostolates...

With joy we see that the growth of the Mother House is reproduced in due proportion in each of our houses. Haven't you noticed the progress they make day by day? Oh, praise this action of Divine Providence and thank the Lord powerfully! To ponder on all this will increase and strengthen your confidence in Him. Be even more grateful for the goodness of God who wills to bless our poor efforts in this way and to crown them with such consoling success.

*Do well all that you do.*

3. I would like one thought to be supreme in your minds: it is that as it is right for each Sister to contribute to the benefit of all and to the good reputation of the Institute, so each one must apply herself to doing her particular work as perfectly as possible. Remember, you are the instruments God has chosen to co-operate in the salvation of souls; that it is given to you to cultivate the mustard seed which he plans to make into a great tree in his Church's plot. That is where all your efforts should be directed. It is for you to make it possible that those exhausted and lost in the ways of sin should find strength in the shade of this healing tree. Now, how do you think you can work effectively to that end? It is by faithfully fulfilling your duties, and from this will come the beauty of God's house. Meditate on these words of Jesus: "It is not you who have chosen me, it is I who have chosen you." And why us? What a profound reason for gratitude! Our vocation is more to be envied than that of earthly Kings. They can win battles, but we can win souls for God. As soon as you see God's plan for you, hasten to

be faithful to it. Our weapons are our rules and constitutions: may they also be the guide of your thoughts, your attitudes, your actions and everything you do.

*Make every effort to add to your faith and goodness. (2 Pet. 1:5)*

4. Have a high esteem of your vocation - and what a sublime one! Oh yes, if you keep faithfully to the mission God has entrusted to you, if you love it sincerely, you will be able to do much good, for great works are only achieved by love.

Everything in you must contribute to your progress on the way of perfection; faith by its light, hope by its strength, purity by its fragrance, charity by its gentle warmth, and obedience by its fruitful blessings. You will reach the height of your vocation and the holiness God calls you to only by cherishing in your soul these fundamental virtues. It is only by their practice that you will become like trees forever green, planted by the water's edge, which never lose their leaves and produce fruit at the right time.

*Like refreshment to a weary soul  
is good news from a distant land. (Prov. 25:25)*

5. Now, dearest daughters, we shall gladly make known to you the consolations we have received. When we keep on telling you to be grateful to God for the Institute and to devote yourselves entirely to it, you will see that we have plenty of motives to spur you on. St. Paul, writing to the Romans said: "I long to see you and speak to you of certain graces so as to strengthen you." (Rom. 1:11 1) And for my part, I long to let you know what God is doing for us to comfort you and increase your zeal.

Yesterday a letter came from Modena letting us know that everything is ready to receive the Good Shepherd Sisters; the price of the fares has also been sent us. By the same post comes a request for a foundation in another big city. And that is not all; this morning, one of our Sisters in Bristol writes us news which will cause you as much joy as surprise. Her brother, an important person in the English Court, was so moved by our work for young prisoners, that he persuaded his government to entrust young Catholic offenders to our house in Bristol. Our little band of Sisters, who left to found a house at Santiago in Chile, is already far away on the high seas. The Sisters destined to establish our work at Suben in Austria will be there for the Feast of the Presentation. Really, there is no stopping us! It's like Jacob's ladder with angels going up and down. You have heard of the generosity of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Chile and the benevolence which he has repeatedly shown us. Our Sisters in India write: "Oh, Mother, what a beautiful mission has been entrusted to us! We have pagans to instruct, idolators to convert. These thoughts rouse our zeal and make us experience such inner peace and heavenly consolations as cannot be described." Yes, let us go on praying and never tire of giving thanks.

*Later on.*

*O my God, I cannot understand..*

6. If anyone of you, my dear daughters, has no love for the apostolate proper to her vocation, it is because self-love has stifled good dispositions. As for me, I must admit that, on the founding of new houses, I feel caught up in God. Our devout founder, M. de Neuville, felt the same joy; his heart overflowed with happiness when new sheepfolds were opened, and he often wanted to contribute towards them by his generous donations. When our Sisters left to begin the first of our houses in America (Louisville) he gave three thousand francs. Madame d'Andigné gave the sacred vessels, the vestments and many other things towards the foundation. What would these saintly benefactors say now! What joy would they not feel! Oh! my God I cannot understand how so many houses have come from this poor house of Angers ... !

*Listen to my cry for help. (Ps. 5:12)*

7. A holy ecclesiastic lately said to me: "The prayers and longings of helpless souls in foreign lands, which await with all their hearts those who will become their mothers according to grace, must contribute much to the success of your missions, for these prayers are favourably heard by Divine

Mercy. Everyone moved by the Spirit of God loves the work of the Good Shepherd. Your Congregation is becoming as necessary as the air we breathe. If I had my way I would establish a Good Shepherd House in every city, even if it meant taking in only two penitents!"

In fact, dear daughters, missionaries, having converted a few souls, haven't the means of assuring their perseverance without the help of Good Shepherd houses. If a great sinner comes back to God in all sincerity and takes the firm resolution of fleeing from the occasions of sin, and then finds no shelter, no help, nor even work, what will become of her? She has to choose between misery and death or the going back to her sinful ways.

*All souls belong to me. (Ezek. 18:4)*

8. Remember that many souls are still far from the way to salvation. We must pray to our Divine Master that they hear His voice so that "there may be one fold and one shepherd." (*Jn. 10.16*) This conference is certainly the last before the Sisters leave for Modena. They are going because Cardinal Patrizzi, our venerated Protector and His Highness, the Archduke Maximilian, founder of the work, are urging us to hasten their arrival in Italy. Meanwhile I ask you once again, why do they want us so much! It is for the sake of souls who need our help. Souls! That is the one reason which draws down on us the benevolence of the court at Modena. We must never weary of speaking of our fourth vow.



## CHAPTER 36

### PURITY OF INTENTION, THE GLORY OF GOD, THE SALVATION OF SOULS

*Blessed are the pure in heart  
for they shall see God. (Matt. 5:8)*

1. My dear daughters, when St. Ignatius was inspired to found a religious order, which is one of the most beautiful jewels in the Church's crown, he took as his standard the wellknown motto: "All for the greater glory of God." This one aim gave direction to all his enterprises - he had no other ambition. The glory of God and the salvation of souls is the fundamental principle which has sustained his Institute, in spite of storms designed to annihilate it.

The same may be said of all founders of Religious Orders; certainly they would never have survived were they moved by any other motive. St. Paul himself said: "I speak and act not to please men but God who reads men's hearts." (*Tit. 2:4*) Again he said: "I glory in my weakness that I may know the power of God." (*2 Cor. 12:9*)

"God alone": don't look for happiness anywhere else, but be sure to refer all you do and all you may do to His glory and the saving of souls. Be convinced of this; when your actions are done in this spirit, however small, unimportant or lowly they seem, they will be of great worth and very meritorious, and will, as it were, bear the seal of holiness. Alas! if a person called to be a Religious had any other aim, she would be gravely mistaken. That is why I never tire of recommending purity of intention in all you do, in prayer, at work, in the practice of our rules and observances, in everything. A person who strives to do this never suffers the troubles, the discouragement and the miseries which, unhappily come all too frequently from self love; she sees only the good pleasure of God in everything, and clings only to doing His will faithfully; she thinks solely of His glory and the salvation of souls, so she is always content however things turn out.

*Blessed are those whose strength  
is in you. (Ps. 84:5)*

2. On the contrary, someone else who seeks herself, who is bound by a thousand ties of self-interest, to whom purity of intention is quite alien, usually experiences disillusionment and disquiet. Trusting in her own strength, God leaves her to it, for he gives his help and comfort rather to souls who acknowledge their weakness and place all their hope in his grace. Don't delude yourselves! The call you have answered exacts entire self-abnegation. You wish to break the chains binding souls to Satan? Be prepared to face his furious onslaughts.

*Let nothing disturb you...  
... God alone suffices. (St. Teresa of Avila)*

3. You anger hell so it unleashes its rage against you with more violence than against other Religious. You must become very strong. And how will you do that? By endeavouring to do all for God's glory and the saving of souls; there you will find the only real help to sustain you. You will be attacked. You will be exposed to slander and calumny; you will grieve and suffer in many ways, but, even in the height of your distress, your souls will be in peace. But there! dear daughters, never be discouraged. God is the master of trial and consolation. Sometimes he allows the enemy of good to unleash his anger and harass us, but our Lord never leaves us without the blessing of his powerful hand.

Let us always lean on such a sure support, and work ever harder to purify our intentions. The glory of God and the saving of souls must be the aim of all we do.

## CHAPTER 37

### LET THERE BE LIGHT

*Send out Thy light and Thy truth. (Ps. 43:3)*

1. In the first chapter of Genesis we read that, when the earth emerged from nothingness, it was shrouded in thick darkness, formless and without the beauty later to be added. Then God began to create, in detail, the various works we admire in the universe. First he said: "Let there be light", and there was light.

The Apostle Paul applies these words to another kind of creation, that is, to the light given our souls in the work of our justification and salvation. He says: "the God who brought light out of darkness, is the same who made His light shine in our hearts." (2 Cor. 4:6) And isn't it a fact, dear daughters, that we often see this creation renewed in our souls, once again bringing about the all powerful works of God? Have we not often heard in the depths of our hearts: "Let there be light", when God has willed to enlighten our understanding, making us see the passing nature of earthly things, and the happiness of serving him, so much so, that a supernatural light has been shed on all our actions bringing them to life. Every good impulse, all the holy longings that awaken in our souls are evidence of the Lord's light. Happy those who know how to profit by them!

*Lead kindly light! (J. H. Newman)*

2. We have seen unhappy souls who after ten, fifteen or twenty years of deadly apathy, and unfaithful because of their neglect of the light of grace, were suddenly totally changed by a prompt correspondence with an unusual light from God, perhaps in a retreat, by a fervent communion or a profound meditation. This happened to a Sister, mentioned by a preacher, who, after a conference exclaimed: "I want to be a saint now!" And in fact she became one. In the same way that the natural light illumining the world was the first work of creation, so it can be said that supernatural light given us by God is the first of many graces. This light penetrates deeply and wholly disperses the darkness of our hearts. It was this light that shone for the Magi and the Shepherds and wondrously guided them to Bethlehem. It was the same light, which in a great flash dazzled St. Paul on the road to Damascus, which revealed St. Augustine to himself in the garden at Tagaste, which enlightened St. Francis Xavier when St. Ignatius reminded him: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own life?" (Matt. 16:26) These great saints knew how to profit from this grace and with God's help, they went from light to light.

*Be very faithful to grace. (S. M. E.)*

3. So be faithful in following this inner light which it pleases God to give each one of you. May it enlighten you, may it always go with you! The more you follow this light and grace, the more you will savour that delightful peace which is our joy in this world. With its help you will walk with firm steps on the way of obedience whose paths are blessed by God, and your obedience will not consist simply of an outward submission but in a sincere conformity of your judgement and will to the Superior's orders. Must we not admit, dear daughters, that it is sometimes with a certain repugnance that we obey, a certain aversion to doing things distasteful to us? Woe to us if we listen to these rebellious thoughts within us: they increase and rise like a fog on all sides, darkening our minds and preventing us from seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, we quickly yield our judgement, we make our obedience more pleasing to God and we advance on the road of perfection

*If I have not love - I am nothing. (cf. 1 Cor. 13:3)*

4. This light from above will become like a brilliant light-house which will enlighten us in our vocation. We were able to see that in a special way in our first novices, whose fervour was so remarkable. I could give you many examples, but I will limit myself to reminding you of our dear Sr. Mary of St. Basil Joubert. What devotion and what humility, what zeal! She was still only a novice when we were able to give her positions of trust as though to an older professed Sister and be sure that she would carry them out perfectly and conscientiously. After a day's hard work her cheerfulness was a delight at our recreations. Her virtue was not austere, but gentle, warm and affectionate.

Everybody loved her but without her seeking for it, for she referred her least actions to God's glory. Having had a hint that she might be named Superior of a new house at Lille, she begged God, in a fervent prayer, all too surely heard, to die rather than to be given a charge she considered far above her strength. The same day that she was named Superior she contracted a fever, and in a few days was taken from us - being only three years professed.

I certainly do not ask you to imitate this last act of praying for death. On the contrary, I forbid such a prayer! What I do recommend you is to acquire Sr. M. of St. Basil's fervour, her self-forgetfulness, her charity and love for our apostolates. Without love, one is as though frozen and lifeless and incapable of anything. A love of our vocation, and of the Mother House, on the other hand kindles a fire in us, a zeal which enables us to overcome any obstacle.

*For you who revere my name the Sun of Righteousness  
will rise with healing in His wings. (Mal. 4:2)*

5. The purity of such a love, having the glory of God as its sole object, gives light to our souls and makes them fruitful, enabling every virtue to flourish there. The light, which our Saviour reveals to us in this house of prayer, has the same effect on us as the sun's rays have on nature. Under its beneficent power, faith is livelier, hope stronger and humility greater. It kindles in our hearts the fire of charity, and creates between God and us a holy union of love which the angels contemplate with wonder and which makes of a religious house as it were another Thabor, a living image of Heaven. One day, some Carmelites asked Mother Ann of Jesus what means they ought to take to keep constantly in the presence of God. This great servant of God replied only in the words of scripture: "Let there be light", and for a long time afterwards in her conferences and chapters she explained the effects of divine light in souls that receive it with humble willingness.

*Lord, that I may see! (Lk. 35:40)*

6. In this way self - love is destroyed and our souls are purified of the imperfections which impede our union with God. Scripture tells us that our Lord came into this dark world like a shining light and that the darkness did not recognize Him. Sometimes it happens that Religious think they are less fervent than they were before they entered. Would you like to know whence comes this conviction? It arises from the fact that, after some time in the Religious Life, they realize they have certain defects of which they were quite unaware in the world. The depth of their nothingness is revealed in the splendour of the new light; they can, as it were, count their imperfections one by one and so they see their own misery.

Blessed Agnes of Jesus relates that she prayed for an ecclesiastic, that she fasted, wore sackcloth and shed many tears, because in the Lord's light she saw how he kept certain imperfections, of which he was quite unaware, but which prevented him from receiving special graces destined for him. Notice that this worthy priest also fasted, did penance and spent several hours a day in prayer! How often we know little of ourselves!

*Lord that I may know Thee!  
That I may know me! (one of the first Jesuits)*

7. Let us examine ourselves, dear daughters, isn't it really our own fault if we suffer interior darkness and if our Lord seems silent in our hearts? Should we not fear that there are stains in the depths of our soul which are offensive in His light, and which keep Him at a distance? However, we must not lose courage: on the contrary, we must find God again and come to Him humbly, hoping to receive His lights. With the prophet, let us cry to Him: "You are my lantern, O Lord; O my God enlighten my darkness." (Ps. 17:29) And He will open our soul to his truth, and let us see our faults, and will increase our ardour to strive for holiness. Even if He hides himself to test us, we must know how to yield to His holy will, and never give up seeking Him, convinced that He will not fail to give us His light again one day. But where could you best find God, beloved daughters? You will find Him again in recollected prayer and above all in Holy Communion. Listen to the Prophet King: "O my God, it is you who are the source of life and it is in your light we shall see light." (Ps. 35: 10) Yes, in prayer and Holy Communion we shall acquire the knowledge of God and of ourselves; the knowledge of God so that we may love Him, and the knowledge of ourselves so as to distrust ourselves. In Holy Communion

good desires unfold like flowers and the soul understands the need for pruning, that is, for the removal of the dead wood of its faults.

## CHAPTER 38

### ON THE NEED TO WATCH OVER OURSELVES

*Beware of the flock of your own passions!*

1. My dear daughters, I feel quite sure that generous souls will come here from every nation, called by God to our Institute! Consequently this Mother House of Angers will be model and role to the other houses of our order which will spring up all over the world. Sisters will come to this dear novitiate and will then leave carrying everywhere the spirit and charitable works of the Good Shepherd. So, to prepare for their apostolic missions, the novices must, above all, become accustomed to watching over a flock that is both dangerous and difficult to control. I mean the flock of their own passions, roused by the unruliness of capricious imaginations which unfortunately have too much ascendancy in all of us. It is of the utmost importance to have the upperhand of our inclinations and our imagination. One could say that, except for a great grace, it is almost impossible to overcome and keep them reined in once they have the mastery over us.

Perhaps some Sisters are horrified by their faults, believing them to be an unsurmountable obstacle to the practice of virtue; experiencing the turmoil these faults cause within, they lose courage and despair of ever being able to follow the road to holiness. It is a grave mistake to think like that, and will only harm such souls by increasing the discouragement which weakens their spiritual vigour.

*Use everything to bring souls to God.*

2. Notice, that in general, one gives the name 'passion' to any attachment of the soul which tends to arouse in us such a violent reaction as robs us of our normal inner peace and tranquility. This could be caused, for example, by an ardent affection for someone, by a strong bias, by excessive anxiety or a too eager desire for anything. Now all these affections, these burning desires can be turned to good when we learn to control them by discernment; and when under the influence of grace, we direct them to fight channels, purifying them with the intention of seeking only the will of God and His glory, and in no way seeking our own satisfaction.

Turn these thoughts and feelings towards our Lord, show them to your Master. Have you a lively wit, a warm heart? Are you kindly, cheerful, frank, of a vivid imagination? Use all that as a means of saving souls, when used with good judgement. God shared His gifts with you, use them to bring souls to him.

The courage for great enterprises which you feel so strongly and your fearlessness in overcoming the obstacles you meet, cherish and regulate them; under the inspiration of the Lord they will be a powerful means to found new houses, to raise churches and do what to others might seem madness to attempt.

*Wish to live only for Jesus.*

3. However, be on your guard, my dear daughters, and watch over yourselves continually remembering that, as the Apostle says, we always carry within us an inclination to evil, the wretched fruit of original sin. So we must fight this evil tendency without slackening, using the heart's impulses for good, impulses which otherwise would lead to our ruin. This is what the saints did, always striving to put their bad inclinations to death, ever struggling to gain the mastery over them, turning their desires from unworthy things to direct them towards God.

We know that St. Francis de Sales was born with a strong inclination to anger and he became a model of sweetness and gentleness! We know that St. Augustine was unhappily prone to idolize creatures; he conquered himself, turned all his capacity to love towards our Lord and we have his beautiful exclamation: "God is my love, my centre. I wish to live only for Jesus. This is my passion, this my sole desire!" Again we know that St. Ignatius of Loyola was proud and vain but once he understood the nothingness of worldly things, he set out to humble himself and to do all for God's glory, so that he took as his motto: "All for the greater glory of God." In the same way among us there

would be some who are naturally proud, impatient, hot-headed; others who would be disobedient, difficult and changeable in character; some, unjust, devious. It is these last that I would most fear, because it is rare that such persons really look into themselves, that they seriously take stock of their behaviour; it is rarer to get to know them well. Well! my dear daughters, all those bad inclinations can and must be corrected; that is why we will never allow any of you to follow her moods and caprices. Dear Novices don't be discouraged! The efforts made to conquer evil tendencies last only a little while, because finally nature is subject to the Spirit, good habits are acquired and one goes right ahead without too much difficulty.

*We all have a «favourite fault»!*

4. Since no-one is without a dominant fault it is important to discover it, to challenge and resist it. Otherwise it would tyrannize over us and poison every action. But one of the most difficult things is to know and acknowledge one's weakness. We are all too ready to flatter and deceive ourselves. According to a Benedictine monk it often happens that we have an imperfection, a defect, one could call our favourite fault which everybody sees except ourselves; or if we do see it we have the knack of shutting our eyes to it, to excuse it, without thinking that it could bring down on us great wrongs, serious chastisement or, at the very least, deprive us of infinite treasures of grace. Let us learn how to shrewdly turn to our advantage what might cause our ruin. How is it, dear daughters, that you have not attained perfection? Believe me, it is due to your not yet having worked seriously at overcoming your predominant fault.

People who are governed by fear usually commit only minor faults, but most often one senses in these an indefinable hardness. Those in whom friendliness is pre-dominant are capable of committing greater faults, even grave ones, but generally they are sensitive and grateful. So, watch over your poor heart as carefully as possible, naturally speaking it is so weak, so easily moved. Be on your guard that it may never yield to any love that could displease Him to whom it is solemnly consecrated.

*Turn to the Angels for help.*

5. The perfect union which, up to now reigns in our Convents, is a great consolation to me. The professed Sisters love each other and the Novices as well; while the Novices are fond of each other and like the Professed Sisters too. Oh! may there never be preferences among you! Love all your Sisters, and they will all love you. To have only one heart and soul is so beautiful! The Mother House must, above all, keep this holy liberty of spirit, just as the three young Hebrews remained whole and untainted in the midst of the flames. God wishes the centre to stay pure, for, as you know, if a fountain however beautiful, becomes muddy, all the streams flowing from it do so too. That is why, you see, we care for you here with such concern, looking after you to shield you from every breath of evil. To win the battle against your imperfections invoke the assistance of the Principalities and Powers who will certainly help you "for the Lord has ordered his angels to keep you wherever you go." (Matt. 4:6) Place yourselves under the protection of the heavenly spirits and never doubt their help. I strongly recommend a devotion to these Princes of heaven: you will experience much comfort from it. Yes, with them you will achieve fine victories in your spiritual battles, and you will conquer your most dangerous enemies, above all those who lay the worst snares for you.

And finally, there is Holy Communion. In this intimate union with our Lord is our greatest strength. Entering into us, Jesus makes Himself our soul's protector. With such help and the co-operation of your good will, you need not fear remaining enslaved to your faults; on the contrary, you will succeed in turning your natural inclinations into virtues.

## CHAPTER 39

### ON PRUDENCE AND CERTAIN DEFECTS OF CHARACTER

*Replace the weeds of your defects by good growths.*

1. My dear daughters, it is my intention to destroy, as far as possible, all the miseries and defects which could impede the progress of our dear Institute. To bring this about I challenge you to let no day pass without overcoming one of your defects or bad inclinations; I assure you that if you take a little time for this you will end by uprooting all your faults. One must not let the weeds grow or they will sow themselves again and again! I say this only by way of exhortation; indeed, I am not correcting or reproaching because, thank God, not one of you has given me reason to blame her conduct. Now, while striving to rid your hearts of weeds and poisonous plants, you must take care to replace them with good growths. By that I mean the basic virtues which we must cultivate in our souls so as to become true Religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

*Imagine the unhappiness caused by our defects of character!*

2. First we advise you, for Charity's sake, to be very careful to correct your faults of character, faults which are almost born with us, and which are the most difficult to recognize and so the most difficult to change. Here in Angers, in this big house, one could say that such defects can scarcely be seen nor cause much inconvenience in the community. In fact, how do you imagine that, in a crowd of Religious, anyone would notice a Sister who may be disobliging or bad-tempered? There are so many others who make up for her by the fraternal charity which keeps the conversation pleasant! And so things go on. But suppose we are in a small foundation, a little family, where necessarily in constant contact, and suppose one Sister among them who cannot control her temper, or has other defects of character, imagine the consequent unhappiness! It is not rare that such unhappiness comes to the point of being unbearable. Certain characters, eaten up by jealousy, believe that others are preferred to them, brood and complain. One does not know how to treat them. Other people habitually speak impatiently and harshly; when they correct, they shout and lack the courtesy proper to a religious. They always seem to be angry and these defects appear to them quite forgivable and insignificant, so they do not bother about them nor ever consider correcting them.

It is precisely these bad habits, known as defects of character, which make relationships so difficult and painful with those persons who are dominated by them. We know that pagan philosophers have sought occasions to practice the virtue of patience, even by paying for them! So it should not be too hard for us who fight under the banner of the Cross.

*Be prepared to put up with all the annoyances  
.... you will meet in your work. (S.M.E.)*

3. You know what the Sisters-in-charge have to put up with, when, among the penitents or the children of other groups, there is someone who is very difficult to manage. I must admit that I have never suffered so much as when my intentions have been misunderstood, and discord is provoked by mere nothings. I remember one penitent who was, without doubt, busy, devoted and punctual. Unfortunately she was so jealous that if she fancied I favoured one of her companions more than herself, she left her work and turned the whole house upside down. Well, it could happen that you may meet persons who seem devout and kindly, and who get into these states, and who cannot admit that they are wrong.

*Get rid of all .... anger and shouting. (Eph. 4:3 1)*

4. Notice that, where it is a question of real sins, they are usually recognized and corrected. As for faults of character they are not seen as sinful by their owners, and so it is extremely difficult to get the offender to reform. Somebody, for example, who was abrupt and rude at home, rarely changes on entering religion. She reverts to her old ways usually after her Novitiate. Sent to other houses, she troubles the peace of the Community, is disedifying in the groups and is an obstacle to good in a thousand ways. What happens is just what happens to a carriage when one wheel is damaged, the

rest are affected and cannot function properly. Oh, what a terrible responsibility for the one who causes such upsets. If we were speaking of Trappistines, Poor Clares or Carmelites, perhaps it would not matter so much if a Sister had such defects, because their vocation requires that these good religious live in solitude; we, on the contrary, are in constant contact with one another. Our girls observe and judge us. The world outside in its turn, weighs us up, and criticizes us. So you see how necessary it is that all of us behave so as to edify, and bring our Holy Congregation into good repute and never to be a cause of scandal.

*Sincerity inwardly, holy regularity outwardly.*

5. Our Institute must be well constituted so that not one of its members should disgrace it. Imagine that our houses are made of glass, and allow everything we do to be seen. People outside inspect our conduct, are quick to find fault, even for those things the world itself approves. So, it is essential that in all circumstances we use holy and religious prudence: inward and outward prudence, the prudence of the serpent as the Gospel recommends, prudence of action and of the tongue, prudence in confidentiality and even in our relationships with one another. We must behave with utter sincerity and regularity in our outward bearing and in our inmost motivation. Without this we may be sure that, sooner or later, regrettable consequences will follow. St. Ignatius said: "The malice of our enemies has made me more prudent than the advice of our friends."

*A foolish man believes anything,  
but a prudent man gives  
thought to his steps. (Prov. 14:15)*

6. As for us, may we give no reason for it to be said that the imprudence of our Sisters has opened our eyes, and the experience serves as a guide. If it were not that prudence and discretion oblige me to maintain great reserve, I could give you examples that would astonish you, and would make you see the sad consequences of a lack of prudence. What I can say is that thoughtlessness and imprudence in administration are capable of ruining us; and even of menacing the existence of the Congregation. And you understand, I'm not speaking here of a person who is acting with malicious intent. Not at all! I am speaking of someone who merely by a lack of serious thought lets herself be carried away from the path of prudence: fatal thoughtlessness; fatal imprudence which engulfs us in misfortunes!

*Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning. (Prov. 14:33)*

7. St. Basil says, and with him all the Doctors of the Church, that prudence consists in the right discernment of what must or must not be done according to the various circumstances prevailing. "May your eyes always perceive things aright", says the sage, "and may they guard your steps, watching carefully where to place your feet." (Prov. 4:25,26) Do nothing without reflection and a right and pure intention. Persons who act lightly and without thinking what they are doing, are heading for disaster. He who wants to live wisely, goes the saying, must be a thoughtful man.

*He who guards his tongue  
keeps himself from calamity (Prov. 21:23)*

8. Above all be prudent with our penitents and our other children. For example, when one of you is to leave one section and go elsewhere it would certainly not be prudent for her to say goodbye to those she is leaving, and express regret at having to leave them, with eyes swollen with weeping, and standing all tearful in their midst, sighing, "I shall do the will of God, I abandon myself to His providence", and such things. What effects could that have? Probably its disorder and restlessness in the group. Never allow yourself to be carried away by your imaginations; you might commit fault after fault; and just one such among you would be capable of doing considerable harm to the good name of the Community, and prevent the success of its works. Almost always, our imprudence sooner or later becomes public. It could even happen that the fable of the wolf and the lamb would be at our expense and people would say, "If you are not responsible for this folly, one of your Sisters is."



*Whoever is kind to the poor honours God. (Prov. 14:31)*

9. In the parlour, take care to behave with great wisdom and prudence, to maintain a noble and Religious bearing, a serious and at the same time gentle attitude. Beware of saying anything that smacks of arrogance or harshness; this would be enough to disedify or arouse even more hate against Religious Orders, and cause goodness knows what things to be said of us. Be prompt in going when you are called so as not to give rise to impatience and insults. A poor workman sometimes deprives himself of food to come and see his daughter who is in one of our establishments. If you keep him waiting perhaps he will lose his wage of forty sous. Who will give his children bread that evening? We must be good, very good to workmen.

We also recommend you not to make known in the parlour what goes on in the house, unless it is a question of something edifying, which could be of interest outside, and contribute to the good of the house. St. Ignatius was very strict on this point. The Holy Spirit himself says: "Houses are founded by wisdom and grow strong by prudence." (Prov. 24:3)

*The discerning heart seeks knowledge. (Prov. 15:14)*

10. At the time we were asking Rome for the erection of the Generalate, we were advised to justify ourselves in writing about several things which had been said against us. We have since learnt that, had we done this, it could have prevented the Holy See from granting our request. Another time, I was urged to write certain things to a certain person, I thought about it a lot, and finally decided it was necessary. Fortunately it was the day for Confessions: I spoke about it to the Confessor who said: "Oh my child, what have you done? Do everything you can to retrieve your letter from the post, if it has not already gone." Thank God, we succeeded in getting back what we would have given anything for! But you will understand, that it is easier to prevent wrong than to remedy it. Remember, be as prudent as serpents and as simple as doves.

*A cheerful look brings joy to the heart. (Prov. 15:30)*

11. Don't imagine that thoughtfulness and prudence will prevent you from being kindly and cheerful at recreation: on the contrary, along with them come a conscience at peace, and this peace fills the soul with purest joy, making it attentive and docile to the Holy Spirit.

A young religious, who was only twenty years old when she died and was humble and perfectly obedient, used to watch her least actions so as to be faithful to every recommendation. Nevertheless, she delighted all her companions by her unaffected and friendly manner; the biggest fault against the rule she could accuse herself of was to have dropped something inadvertently, during the great silence. So on her death-bed, this chosen soul, full of faith and trust said: "I am going to leap over heaven's walls straight into our Lord's arms!" Imitate her thoughtfulness and obedience if you want to have the good fortune to rejoice as she did in such a serene and happy death.

*By your words you will be justified  
and by your words you will be condemned (Matt. 12: 37)*

12. Avoid wounding charity. Listen to nothing and say nothing which could tarnish, however slightly, another's reputation. When some problem arises, condemn nobody, defend the absent, and above all, side with your Superior, saying that all you are prepared to do is obey; otherwise you risk experiencing the truth of the words of scripture: "There is a way that seems straight to man, but which leads to death." (Prov. 14:12)

Be prudent whom you confide in. Resolve not to open your heart to everyone but only to those guides given you by God and who consequently have the light to counsel you in doubt and difficulty. You wouldn't believe all the harm that could follow these intimated outpourings made to those who shouldn't receive them. The professed Sisters have the Superior or the Assistant. The Novices have their mistresses who leave nothing undone towards their progress, who are always ready to listen, to instruct, to counsel. So never go to others, or you will miss the straight path. The Prophet asks: "How will a man, young and inexperienced, make straight his path? He will succeed, Lord, by putting your words into practice." (Ps. 118:9) Well, who will know the Lord's words if not the persons whom He

himself has chosen to be your interpreters of God's will? So abstain from intimate confidences with persons, who, not having received from God the charge of directing you, could lead you off the road you should follow, notwithstanding their good intentions.

*He who winks with his eye is plotting perversity. (Prov. 16:30)*

13. Never be devious and crafty. And never say, for example, "Let's keep what we have said a secret from our Mother", for, you see Superiors have their particular gift, a kind of intuition which makes them aware if anything is wrong. I must admit that when a religious is not doing her duty, if she has taken the path of disobedience although I know nothing about it, I feel within me a certain uneasiness about her, which gives me no rest, and is a kind of warning that she is failing in that straight-forwardness which is characteristic of the good religious.

Look at our older Sisters who are such examples in living the Religious Life; they don't go whispering secretly to this one or that one, they are not partial in their affection, they are loved by everyone and they love you all in God.

*Whoever gives heed to instructions, prospers. (Prov. 16:20)*

14. Dear Novices, you have not yet much experience but if you are teachable and therefore prudent, you will see what is wrong and will know how to avoid it. If, however, you are shallow and imprudent you will make blunders and take unwise decisions and will suffer the consequences.

From all that I have said, let me sum up: first, that each of you must be watchful over herself, so as not to give way to the defects and quirks of character of which we spoke earlier. Secondly, that if it is necessary to use great discretion and prudence between you, with how much more reason must you do so in the classes, as much in your dealings with the penitents and children as in your relationship with the mistresses; and above all great prudence with people outside.

## CHAPTER 40

### ON SOME WEAKNESSES TO AVOID

#### *Forget yourself!*

1. I propose, dear daughters, to speak a little today about certain weaknesses which could easily slip in among us, take hold, and harm the holiness of our Institute. To begin with, I will point out two snares, emphasising that they are completely contrary to our spirit. The first, which is easy to fall into, is to think too much about oneself and one's health, to be forever considering oneself without bothering about what concerns others; anxious to lack nothing, seeking the best clothing, and leaving the less good to others - in a word to be always busy about oneself and forgetful of our neighbour. You will readily see that this results in culpable egoism. For example, a Sister-in-charge of the girls, who thought only of herself and not of those in her care, neglecting to look after the sick, indifferent to others, would be deprived of the blessings for which a self-forgetful Religious hopes from the Lord.

#### *Be unpretentious and obedient.*

2. The other snare I must warn you to avoid, creeps in by an attitude quite the opposite to the one I have just described, but it is none the less dangerous and contrary to our spirit. This consists in a Religious imagining that, for the sake of perfection she should completely neglect herself, mortify herself in everything, without realizing that pride can taint even mortifications, and cause faults against obedience. These types of persons practise austerities without permission under pretext that they haven't been expressly forbidden them. The result is that they lose their strength and make themselves unfit for the work they should be doing for the salvation of souls. They say they want to do penance? Let them do it, certainly! But not according to their own whims, looking for the extraordinary instead of using simply the ordinary means and occasions for selfdenial, which are never lacking, and are very pleasing to God. For example they can keep the rule exactly, observe strict silence, keep custody of the eyes in the refectory, accept whatever dishes there are, give up their own will, be quick to offer their services; and in everything be unpretentious, obedient, loving and gentle. Let them be humble, yielded to the will of God, without seeking themselves. By doing all this well, they will certainly practise self-denial and penance fruitfully.

#### *Keep busy!*

3. It wouldn't be possible to send sickly sisters to Africa or America: these Missions entail too much work. Perhaps, someone will say that she feels the need for mortifications to combat temptations. To that I reply by citing St. Jerome's example. Seeing that his penances did not succeed in extinguishing the worldly thoughts in his soul, he made up his mind to study Hebrew which is very difficult; he succeeded in mastering his imagination haunted by passing pleasures. I am sure that one of the best means to offer you to fight your imaginations is to keep busy, either in your employment, or studies or by handwork.

#### *Stay faithfully at your post.*

4. For those of you who are in charge of the sections a good form of self-denial is to remain constantly at your post without leaving on the merest pretext, staying with the flock you have charge of. Believe me, the girls do not stay quiet, when they see the Sisters going here and there all the time; it is then that they feel how irksome it is to remain seated in one place. Then, when the Directress needs to expostulate with them, to tell them to keep quiet and get on with their work, words are useless, being contradicted by example. A directress who spends long hours with the girls, and is seen to be there willingly, gains their hearts and often succeeds in winning the most difficult characters.

#### *Think of others!*

5. Another thing to beware of is to be over-attached to your employment at the expense of the interest we should bear towards the whole community and to all its departments. There might well be a Sister who would be a good Directress, a work mistress, or sacristan, but who has no concern for

the Community as a whole. It is right to like one's work, the house we are in, the responsibility one has, but this affection must never impair the charity and justice which unite us to each Sister and the whole Institute.

*Avoid tittle-tattle!*

6. While speaking of faults which can creep into the Congregation, I must remind you to avoid uncharitable tittle-tattle: such behaviour is rightly called the plague of a Community and indeed of all society. "The words of the gossip seem simple but they wound the inmost being." says Solomon in Proverbs (Prov. 26:22) When a person in the house is inclined to tell tales, peace is no longer possible, no-one can be at ease. A word is said without any bad intention; but the in former immediately repeats it, exaggerates things and typically, puts a bad construction on them; and there you have unhappiness and disunity, and a thousand sins which follow on each other, all the result of tale-telling. To avoid such a dangerous fault remember the words of the Sage: "There are six things the Lord hates, and His soul detests the seventh, the sower of dissension among brothers." (Prov. 6:16-19)

*Vanity is the silliest vice!*

7. Another serious weakness is the desire to be applauded, to be noticed. In this connection, something I saw when travelling remains disagreeably etched on my memory. Some Religious whom we did not know, imagined they were amusing the travellers by playing certain little games. Well, everybody was talking about them, and you can imagine what was said! How reserved we should be, especially when travelling! Remember that the Lord holds special blessings for those who love solitude and the interior life, busy about pleasing only Him.

*Have sincere good manners!*

8. Keep this lovely simplicity which so becomes a person consecrated to God. Besides, you must understand that the whole glory of a Good Shepherd Religious is to have no glory in this world, to be unknown and hidden. How beautiful are these three lines we found written by one of our dear Sisters:

My glory is to have no glory;  
My honour is to be unhonoured:  
My rank is to be the last among Good Shepherd Sisters.

Beware, Oh! beware of those frivolous manners which detract so much from the good impression we should give our neighbour. I would like you to have a reasonable seriousness, a pleasant modesty, and good manners untinged by worldliness. Modesty is all the more necessary, dear daughters, because you spend your time with foolish people. An unpretentious, calm and prudent bearing is the best adornment. St. Francis Xavier speaking to young religious said: "Be cheerful and serene with everyone; have a kindly approach. Not for you, melancholy, sombre, disdainful attitudes! Courtesy and sincerity are the first two seeds of Christian Charity."

We must avoid affectations in talking: our speech must be like limpid water.

*Put childish ways behind you!*

9. Exaggerated attentions towards the Superior are also faults to be avoided. Spare your Superiors, dear daughters! Show charity for their souls and remember it is better to please them by your obedience than by anything else. Lighten the burden of authority and mind you do not make it heavier by conduct which is neither religious nor docile. This is the best kind of love you can have for your Superiors. I am very glad to see that such is the case here, and I hope this spirit will always prevail among us. I like you to know and share my troubles and my anxieties - that comforts my heart - for I feel that, were I alone in bearing so many difficulties and all the daily cares, I could not endure the weight. But I would not put up with the behaviour I have just spoken of. Of course, Religious must show respect to their Superior, but without affectation.

*God alone!*

10. I conclude by urging you so to behave that you are seen everywhere robe persons consecrated to God. Act only to please Him and promote His glory. Doing this you will become worthier of your vocation and you will reach in peace, the happy end you are making for, where you will find perfect and limitless bliss.

## CHAPTER 41'

### ADMISSION OF FAULTS, CURIOSITY AND INDISCRETION

*To try and make Jesus live and reign in us  
is the sole end to which all our life and  
Christian piety tend. (St. 1. Eudes)*

1. Dear daughters, I have told you several times there are faults which you should acknowledge to the Superior rather than in Confession. For example, you may break a tile, or lose something of a certain value. You haven't committed the slightest sin in these purely inadvertent accidents, but these objects do not belong to you, being Community goods, and so you are guilty of concealment and you could be the cause of someone else being accused. What is more, a Religious whom Satan can accustom to this kind of deviousness is courting ruin. In general, don't be afraid of making your faults known. We all have them, but all have not the virtue to say so.

*Jesus is meek and humble of heart. (Matt. 71:20)*

2. Two qualities help to strengthen fervour in a community. The first is openness and the second, love for our Superiors. When no Sister dissembles, everyone is at ease, not fearful of being accused of faults they have never committed. With respect and love for Superiors, not judging them, but thinking well of what they do, one worries neither them, nor oneself. You might see your Superior making purchases from morning to night, doing business, undertaking projects which you must not misjudge. You know how carefully the Jesuits preserve the primitive spirit of their Founder. All the same, St. Francis Borgia who was only the third General used to say to his sons that they were only candles compared to St. Ignatius' disciples who, by their religious virtues, were like suns. So true it is that people always degenerate without noticing it. Let us beware of coming to such a sad pass; deviousness, lack of respect and deference would bring us to it, little by little.

*Jesus is our peace. (Litany)*

3. Again, curiosity and indiscretion are still the demons of Communities and upset the interior life. Intelligent persons are often curious, but if they don't meet with gossips, not being foolish they would soon correct themselves. In fact, what good is it to know the latest news without someone to lend an ear to it? Such people would soon get tired of being always on the look-out, would like to lead a less strenuous life, for the busy-body's trade is very tiring; no rest for them either at prayer or at recreation, always afraid of missing something, and the people who question them simply make them more avid! I implore you, dearest daughters, don't be newsmongers. It is time wasted or, still worse, you would fail in charity, for certainly you would always be busy about other people, and would only harm your own interior life.

*Jesus is our light. (Jn. 14:6)*

4. Nothing is so bad for the soul as things alien to it; nothing pleases it so much as what touches it closely. So, when I tell you about our houses in Paris, London or Strasbourg, or whether I speak of the arrival of postulants or of a penitent, far from distracting you, it leads you to God; and for me it is both a duty and a joy to share this information. But when I know of serious faults committed in this Community or in the groups, I would not tell you because it is no use your knowing about them, and because I could not do so without failing in Charity. Notice, too, that tittle-tattlers are inclined to be jealous. According to them, "Our Mother" has told them everything and often one hasn't said a single word! Touchy characters imagine others are preferred to themselves, whence is born jealousy and sometimes discord. At Tours there was a Sister who was so tormented by this disease that one could not speak to anyone in front of her without her becoming ashen! She considered herself the world's most despised person and was always tearful.

*Jesus is the Purifier. (Mal. 3:3)*

5. As a consequence of the ascetic life the Carmelites, the Poor Clares and all Contemplative Orders are inclined to jealousy, and often enough Religious are to be found there who are forever worrying as to whether others are preferred to them. However this obsession could be found among us: perhaps several of you don't even know that they are suffering from it, or else they don't dare to admit it to themselves. But it can be seen in their expressions and I assure you that I can detect without fail, if anyone is prone to this wretched weakness - the greatest torment possible. The human heart is a bottomless abyss, dear daughters and the little we do know about it makes us blush. How would it be if we saw it as God sees it?

*Jesus is the Truth. (Jn. 14:6)*

6. Humility, which is truth, has never said, "they like someone better than me, they have no opinion of me, they don't defer to me enough." So be humble, my dears, and we shall never see jealousy. If we die to ourselves we shall never be up in arms if we are forgotten or misunderstood. Willy-nilly we must die, and if we don't succeed in dying to ourselves, God himself will purify us. He loves to achieve this and He knows the best means to do so.

I don't, of course, mean to say that you must renounce life. I simply want to make you understand that it is essential to die to your faults, above all to your self-love. Examine yourself seriously and see whether you are inquisitive, indiscreet, jealous, whether you say, "I much prefer our Mother when she praises and smiles on me than when she corrects me." Ask yourselves whether you never wound charity and frequently commit little infidelities, like talking during silence time, looking about curiously in the refectory and so on.

Remember that these faults are more serious than one would think, for it is the Rule which prescribes them as much as fasts; and a Sister who cannot fast can at least abstain from looking round the refectory. Then see whether you bear patiently with the trying characters of some people. By such mutual tolerance you will earn infinite merit.

## CHAPTER 42

### ON PRACTISING CHARITY

*Love never fails. (I Cor. 13:8)*

1. "God is love." (I Jn. 4:8) May the spirit of Charity always reign in the Institute. Yes, our Congregation is built on love, that beautiful virtue, without which all others lack lustre. Strive to perpetuate it among us. What is more beautiful or more desirable than this charity, this heartfelt love for each other? There must be only one heart in this body. Just as, when one tries to put spangles into a tiny tube and they escape all over the place, so, if we are not united among ourselves, we shall not be united to God, and we shall do no good. Charity and Zeal must be universal, that is, they should reach out and relate to everyone. So long as we have not an all-embracing love, we are sitting in the shadow of death.

"Don't do to others what you would not like done to yourself." (Matt. 7:12) engrave these words in your hearts. Listen to nothing which could tarnish your neighbour's reputation. Never dispute with each other, for no good comes from a house at odds with itself. Mind you never reproach anyone with natural defects, for example, that they are poor, not very bright intellectually or well educated. Try to think well of everybody, avoiding rash judgements. Have great esteem for each other. My dear daughters, don't be self-centred. Nothing is more contrary to a tender and heartfelt charity than cold selfishness. May warm sincerity prevail among you! St. Teresa wrote to Mother Mary of St. Joseph: "I cannot get used to your cold manner. Being with your Sisters pleases me as much as being with you daunts me." Avoid abruptness.

*Love keeps no record of wrongs. (I Cor. 13:5)*

2. We all have our difficult moments: at such times say nothing and never take decisions when you are depressed. Should you see someone commit a fault, give a word of advice quietly. Never repeat to a Sister or even a Superior that you saw such a fault in a foundation; be concerned for each other. If you see someone fall gravely in some way, must people outside be told about it? Would it really serve any purpose for members of the clergy to be informed? Oh, what harm can an indiscreet Sister do! She could perhaps prevent the best of subjects from doing good later - all for a moment's inattention. The account she must render will be greater than that of her Sister and it is she - the tale bearer - who deserves to lose your esteem. Possibly at the very moment the latter is failing in Charity, the person who committed the first fault is filled with such deep contrition, that she is the more virtuous in God's eyes.

*Charity is a wing that carries you to God.*

3. Never belittle each other's good points. When a Sister is praised, add something else good you know about her, and this Charity will cover a multitude of faults in you. St. Teresa, during the period of her tepidity, spent a lot of time in the parlour, but the other Religious used to say: "We are quite sure that Teresa speaks only well of us and of everybody. No-one has ever heard her fail in charity." And so all the Sisters loved her.

May this beautiful charity be a wing that carries you to God: its flight will take you up to the heights of perfection. May it lead you to help poor foundations if you are comfortably off, for remember the goods you administer are not your own, they also belong to the poorest Sisters. We are a Community so do not leave your Sisters to suffer while you are carefree. If, according to Christian teaching, the rich are obliged to give out of their superabundance, with greater reason a Religious, vowed to Poverty, should give what she can. It is much better, dear daughters, to die poor in a poor infirmary, because of our Charity, than to die in the midst of wealth - it is such a short way from the infirmary to heaven for a Religious of the Institute! I was once at the death bed of one of our good Superiors who was forty-two years professed. She said: "My child, I want to share something that will be useful to you later. I have never had an uncharitable thought, so I have never been worried, or disappointed, and I am dying as happy as I was on my clothing day." This dear Mother was never without a sense of the presence of God and she was charmingly gentle and pleasant.



*They will soar on eagle's wings. (Is. 40:31)*

4. Have this same spirit of charity towards your penitents, imitate that Sister who spoke to and treated them as a mother would; she entered into their troubles and let them see some of her problems. As soon as she received some help in her poverty, she was quick to make up to them for the privations which this same poverty imposed on them. Yes, love your penitents. One is naturally inclined to like the people who like us, thus it is possible to do more good. Look how a little child runs to those who care for him and cuddle him! We are all little children in that respect - a trait that is, so to speak, born with us. Be like the eagle with our penitents: at first it takes the fledglings only a short distance from the nest, then it persuades them to fly a little higher, then makes them rest for a few days after the first effort, so that they can try again with renewed courage. And the eagle is also a model for Superiors, who should all have a charity that is sympathetic to the needs and capabilities of each one. We must teach more by example than by word.

*Love is the very essence of our vocation.*

5. A final reason why you should love this spirit of charity is the conviction, surely held by all, that it is the very essence of your vocation.

To conclude, dear daughters, we must do better here at the Mother House than anywhere else, because here the first strong shoots are cultivated, shoots destined to be transplanted to other lands and blossom into marvels to the glory of God.

## CHAPTER 43

### ADVICE ON VISITING THE SICK - CHARITY FOR THE DYING AND DEAD - COMPASSION FOR THOSE BEING TEMPTED.

*God takes pleasure only in houses  
made beautiful by charity.*

1. Where shall we die? How shall we die? Some will die here, but many more far away. Some will end their days peacefully and calmly, others are troubled, sad and sensitive. Their different states often depend on temperament. So, dear Sisters, you must not think badly of an invalid who is irritable and difficult, who receives visitors morosely. She sometimes does more violence to herself in this state than another in whom you admire extraordinary patience, and sweetness. Jesus willed to feel sadness and anguish in his agony. Did he not say: "My soul is sorrowful unto death!" (*Matt. 26:38*) Isn't that comforting for those who, in spite of themselves, are prone to complain of their sufferings? When you visit someone like this, try to find out what subject of conversation will please her most. There are some who will want you to share their pains: well, speak to them of their ills, suffer with them, weep with them. Yesterday, I wept with our poor little Sister in the infirmary and never have I comforted her so much. But if you see that your presence is worrying, leave so as not to arouse impatience. Also, no preaching to the sick, no matter what their illness! You will only irritate them, and far from bringing them to God, you could perhaps put them off. Don't worry about this, they know all they should know, God reminds them of it. When you say that one is happy to suffer, to welcome death, then you make it likely that they will answer, "That is all very well when you are not going through it yourself!" To prove that is a fact, our good Sr. Mary of St. Anselm, who was to be admired for her heroic virtue, always asked me regarding Sisters who would stay with her, for one who would not preach. Generally, noise and talking weary sick people and of course much more the dying.

When my feeble life is o'er  
Guide me gently .... to the shore, (Trad. Hymn)

2. For the dying we must have the same tenderness as for small children. Mind you never leave them alone, no-one is more afraid of being left alone than the dying. When we perceive that one of our dear Sisters is near the end we very gently try to encourage her to make her last sacrifice and that done, we do not speak to her again. I tell you again, if you help our Sisters, they will help you; if you neglect your duty towards the dead, you in your turn will be neglected when you are no more. If you pray for them carelessly, you will be prayed for carelessly: in a word, it will be done to you as you have done to others.

This advice may be applied when counselling people. Don't speak of temptations to someone who is being tempted but, if she comes to you, comfort and encourage her and always try to change her line of thought. In this case take care not to give her longwinded advice, for then temptations she never before thought of will fill her imagination. Prevent her from going back on her past life, say that is the Confessor's business, not yours.

When you help a penitent on her death-bed speak to her only of mercy and love, say nothing that could frighten her. Our attentions touch them, love wins them; redouble if you can, watchfulness and tenderness during their illness; and before long you will see how these means are the most effective for keeping them on the road of holiness. In a word always use gentleness and sympathy, without weakness, however.

*To those who fall how kind thou art  
how good to those who seek. (Jesu Dulcis Memoria)*

3. Our Lord was very intelligent since He was God and so He chose St. Peter as head of the Church. This was so that he might have more pity for sinners since he had himself sinned in denying his Master in such a cowardly way. St. Jerome admits that he had to remind himself continually of God's judgements in order not to become the greatest of all sinners. So, use gentleness first, then

take care to go contrary to temptations. They don't want to do something, don't order it to be done; they show temper, keep cool. One day I knew that a penitent did not want to go to Vespers. I found her and forbade her to go. One day a girl came to the Mistress saying that she would drown herself. (At that time the river had flooded and flowed under the windows of the house.) "That's a great pity", said the Sister, calmly and pleasantly, "because the dress I gave you is quite new. Take it off and then you will be free to do what you like." Seeing the girl had calmed down, she added, "Have you thought of your soul, dear child? Do you realize it would be eternally in hell?" At this the girl was touched, begged pardon for her behaviour and her conversion was most sincere.

Finally, dear daughters, to get back to the sick of body or soul. Let us always be gentle and compassionate, having pity on, rather than condemning, others. Let us love our Sisters and be full of charity for the penitents.

## CHAPTER 44

### ON DEATH TO ONESELF

*You cannot serve two masters. (Luke 16:13)*

1. At the moment all Israel is at peace. Should it become troubled this misfortune will be caused only by those among us who are not dead to themselves. This could be the ruin of the Congregation or, at least, an obstacle to its progress. It is certain, my dear daughters, that people who live a slack and selfindulgent life, have no interest in the works of God and instead of contributing to their progress they leave them to languish and die. "As it is impossible", says St. John Climacus, "to have one's eyes raised to heaven and fixed on the earth at the same time, so it is impossible that anyone who is too obsessed by earthly things should also love heavenly things." So it is impossible that a person be moved by zeal to work for God and her neighbour when she seeks eagerly to please herself. One must get rid of this love of ourselves and the things of this world, then our hearts will rise towards God and his good pleasure. Great works exact thorough self-forgetfulness. Let us busy our selves courageously to acquire this virtue, which is essential to conquer our natural likes and dislikes. Love what is lowly and humbles us, and which weakens our self-love, a bitter sacrifice and difficult to persevere in though it be.

*As long as anything holds me  
I cannot fly freely to you. (Imit. 31)*

2. Be convinced, my dear daughters, that when you seek to satisfy your senses you will not be capable of doing any good in God's service. We must, so to speak, rid ourselves of ourselves if we are to reach the holiness God asks of us. Notice, too, that this counterfeit love of ourselves is so powerful that the first movement in everything we do is to seek what satisfies us. There lies the greatest obstacle to keeping on the road of grace, so we must always be ready for the fight. The most effective weapons for gaining the victory are self-denial and the surrender of everything that merely indulges nature. Look at athletes! What makes them so strong and vigorous? It is moderation in pleasure, and continual exercise that is hard and persevering. Religious should act so in the Spiritual Life, not allowing themselves to be dominated by unworthy affections, fighting urges, deaf to the voice of nature and alert to the call of grace in the depths of the soul. Sometimes a slender human attachment, a little affection for a trifle, ensnares our poor hearts and prevents us from rising to God. To arrive at complete self- abnegation is the most difficult and laborious thing in the spiritual life, it is the work of a life-time for as the author of the Imitation of Christ says: "To leave creatures and forget them is not much, but to despoil oneself entirely, there is the problem." If you are not dead to yourselves, my daughters, you will oblige only too many other people to die to themselves! In fact, the most demanding people are the least virtuous. No-one is so wilful as a Religious who has not crucified her own nature and her attachments, and so there is no-one who is more crucifying to live with.

*I die daily. (1 Cor. 15:3 1)*

3. Always, I repeat always, you will find that the path to holiness is by way of death to oneself, to one's tendencies and self-will. Perhaps some of you will find this doctrine too hard and beyond their human powers. Others will think it is not a general rule, meant for everyone. Don't be deceived, be convinced that death to self is possible and that everyone should strive towards it. Among those listening to me, some are saying, "I want to die to myself, whatever it costs." Others, thinking the same, put limits to their commitment. They think they really cannot renounce such or such a habit. Then there are those who entrench themselves firmly in their self-love. However, I say again, work to set at naught all that does not lead to God. The ways of the world, your caprices, your own will, self-love, judgement and ideas. Renounce all these things to lay them at the foot of the Cross, sacrifice them there in obedience to the Lord. In this way you will walk safely on the road to holiness, keeping company with our Divine Master. Follow Him with great simplicity and a pure heart and He will support you. The Apostle Paul tells us to love in the Spirit, which means that we must surmount our lower nature and fill our minds with thoughts inspired by Faith.

*We have begun, we may not go back  
- take courage! (Imit. 57)*

4. Oh yes, my dear daughters, you renounced the life of the senses when you made your vows: you buried yourselves under the pall to signify that renouncement. Your senses were laid in the tomb and you must leave them there. Don't allow them to make new demands on you and don't seek your pleasure and comfort. Lead a life of sacrifice and poverty, it will all be made up to you in heaven!

As to the life of the world, you have given that up for, as the world itself expects, a Religious no longer thinks of earthly benefits. I know that none of you do. Not one of you would take back with one hand what she gave with the other.

*Leave yourself and any self-seeking  
and you will always be the gainer. (Imit. 37)*

5. However, this world which you have left forever is not really the most dangerous. We have within us a world of desires. That is the one that clamours to be attended to and cherished. If we must be detached from the pleasures of the secular world, much more must we be free of this invisible, inner world which we take with us wherever we go. "Despoil yourself of everything in order to put on Christ." (Rom. 13:14) Live in this world as if your spirit was in heaven and your body in the earth. Said like that, it doesn't sound too impossible, but when it comes to putting it into practice the difficulties become apparent. A person consecrated to God should be buried with our Lord in His tomb, dead to creatures and to herself, stripped of all to put on Jesus Christ. What is the Novitiate for if not to prepare you for this choice - to give everything to God and nothing to nature? When the body dies, the soul will abide in God if we have been faithful to Him in life, it will return, as it were, to its element never to leave it. But if unfortunately, we have loved ourselves too much, if we have pursued creatures in spite of having renounced them, what will become of us at death?

A sign that you were still living like a person in the world would be if you should prefer one kind of work, one person, one house to another and if you made a fuss about the wretched trifles which hamper souls from flying freely towards the Lord. The saints knew what it meant to die to themselves, they did not let any aversion stop them, nor did they complain: "I couldn't make such a sacrifice .... such and such work would cost me too much .... I couldn't possibly leave this house," etc. Religious who are so miserably wedded to their likes and dislikes must never be met with in our Congregation. Remember, dear daughters, that God consoles with interior joy generous souls who refuse Him nothing.

## CHAPTER 45

### ON THE ABUSE OF GRACE

*I will sing to my Beloved  
a song about his vineyard. (Is. 5:1-6)*

1. Today, my dear daughters, I am going to remind you of something Isaiah said, a really frightening saying. Here it is: "Because you have sinned in the land of the saints you shall never see the glory of the Most High." (Is. 26:10) What is this land of saints referred to by the prophet? What else but this house where we have been called to grow in holiness? But should we forget our vocation, profaning this holy place by our infidelities, remember Isaiah's words and think how terrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Those who deceive themselves will perhaps say that the Lord is merciful and that he will pity our weakness. That is quite true, but I am bound to remind them that, while the Lord is merciful, he is equally just and formidable in punishment. Ask our beloved Sisters, now departed, who were called to judgement in His presence. If one of them should appear among us here, she would tell you much better than I, how rigorous and awesome an account of our actions God will ask of us, too, one day. "Because you are Religious and you live in the Lord's house," says Jerome, "don't imagine you have nothing to fear. On the contrary, think that the servant who best knew his Master's will and had better means of doing it; and yet neglected to do so, will be accounted the more culpable and be severely punished."

*My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.*

2. Holy Scripture frequently threatens souls who, having received numerous graces and tokens of love from God, are ungrateful and forget their obligations. I will recall a few here and you will see, dear daughters, that every word I quote deserves a separate instruction. "Woe to you who, having promised fidelity to God, turn back: you will become like a tree with withered leaves or a garden without water." (Is. 1:30) "If you do not obey the Lord's commandments, straying neither to right nor left, you will grope in broad day-light, like a blind man. You will fail in your undertakings and will be struck by various misfortunes." (Dent. 28:29) "I shall water my vine continually lest it be damaged: I shall guard it day and night, and I shall be just and good to her, so long as she is never unfaithful." (Is. 27:3) "When I make known my intention to establish or strengthen a nation or a Kingdom, if they then flout me by their sins and never listen to my words, I shall cancel the plans I had made for their good." (Jer. 18:9, 10) It is not likely that a whole Congregation or even an entire community should be unfaithful to God to the point that all the members of it merit a common punishment. It is however all too likely that everywhere, however holy the places, there will be some culpably blind souls, who deceive themselves regarding their duty, fail in their obligations, ignore the urgings of grace and find their condemnation in what should have been their sanctification.

*He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines.*

3. Should it ever happen that one of you now listening to me, began to fall away from her present religious convictions, God grant that the memory of what I am saying here will alert her to consider her duty seriously. If not, she may merit condemnation and be forever separated from her faithful sisters enjoying the glory of heaven. "For," says Jerome, "there is no merit nor any recompense for having lived in Jerusalem and the Holy Places. But having lived a holy life in the Holy Places, that is meritorious and worthy of reward." Besides could a Religious who is tepid, immortified, selfish, careless and stubborn, continue to live in the land of saints? According to a serious author, such a Religious finds her attraction in this life. Unable to taste the sweetness of the Lord, she is tempted to regret the meat and onions of Egypt, and ends up by a shameful desertion. No longer the spouse of the Lord, she will certainly not find the graces meant for her in the world outside. What will happen to her then? Jerusalem, suffering the penalty of her faithlessness could be seen as a type of a Religious who does not love her vocation and who will later suffer the consequences. Yes, dear daughters, it is a striking and true comparison.

*He built a watchtower in it  
and cut out a winepress.*

4. Like Jerusalem, we are showered every day with the Lord's blessings: he watches over us as the apple of his eye, he covers us with his wings and treats us so tenderly. He often sends prophets to remind us of his holy will and tell us what he wants of us. He protects us from our enemies, putting them to flight. Around us, as in Jerusalem, he raises a surrounding wall to be a defence against attacks. To encourage us in our work and plead with us to stay faithful to him, he speaks to us constantly in the depths of our hearts. He invites us to his table to nourish us with His Body and Blood, as he once rained down Manna in the desert for His Children of Israel. Now, if like Jerusalem, faithless and deaf to her Saviour's voice, a Religious unhappily neglects so many graces, what can she expect? Like Jerusalem when her end comes, she will be surrounded by enemies and perish.

*Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.*

5. I am not, of course, speaking of Religious who fail one way or another by sheer weakness or inexperience. With a good word of advice or some timely happening which makes them think, they will easily find the right road again. But those one fears for are Religious who fail in their duty, almost making a point of deceiving their consciences, and refusing to confront themselves truthfully, and trying to hoodwink those who are responsible for correcting them. Poor souls! I only hope that, even if they succeed in deceiving men, they will realize that they can never deceive God.

*I will take away the hedge .....*

6. Why is it that one sees the dying rallying all their forces to open their hearts entirely to their Superiors? It is because, at the moment of death, when one catches a glimpse as it were, of God's Eternal Light, thoughts come to the soul which are very different to those of this present life. Then one understands how truth is essential, and how pure and candid must be the soul who is about to enter the presence of the Supreme and all seeing Judge. Often think about these truths, and you will never be tempted to yield to carelessness and tepidity. You will, rather, maintain your fervour in God's service, yes, even though you should live until you are eighty! I would even say that the longer the life the more efforts are necessary to overcome difficulties and avoid pit-falls. You have made much progress up to now but that is due to all the help you have received and profited from. Now all you need is the remembrance of God's presence to keep you steady in doing good. He always sees you, weighs you up; and he destines you to carry out his will in such and such a place where you will perhaps be deprived of the spiritual help you have had so abundantly. So lay as foundation of your holiness, the holy fear of God, the fear of displeasing him. Fortunate the soul who preserves this holy fear to the end, she will surely die the death of the just.

*I will break down its wall....*

7. Superiors ought to be watchful and correct faithfully; according to Scripture, they are sentinels in Israel. Well, if the sentinels fall asleep, and never sound the alarm at the sight of the enemy, they are responsible for the misfortunes that beset the army. The Lord also says: "If the just man leaves the right path because you did not correct him when he needed it, he will die in his sins and the memory of his good deeds will be wiped out; but I will call you to account for his death as being guilty of it by your culpable silence." (Ezek. 3:20) So, O Sentinel of Israel, don't forget your duty. Correct with kindness and love but also with zeal and holy freedom. If you do not speak out, if you do not sound the alarm when needed, you will be justly convicted by your silence.

*I will make it a wasteland .....*

8. Dear young novices, and my dear virtuous professed Sisters, be grateful to those who prevent you making a mistake, or who offer you a helping hand to get up after a fall; thank them from your heart. Faults that you make amends for in this way will not harm your soul. Even David, a king after God's own heart, committed a grave sin. Soon however he was converted by accepting the Prophet Nathan's frank and severe correction and God forgave him everything. Another time, David ordered, out of vanity, a census of his people. He wouldn't listen to Joab, commander in- chief of the army, who respectfully pointed out that by this action he might anger the Lord. Consequently, the King incurred

God's severe punishment for his fault. St. Paul preached with great ardour to the Jews in Corinth, but instead of acknowledging the truth, they hardened their hearts all the more. So the Apostle indignantly shook the dust off his garments, saying: "Your blood will fall on your own heads and you will answer for it; as for me, I am innocent. I am turning to the Gentiles and henceforward I am entirely for them." (*Acts 18.5f*) I also wish to be innocent of the blood of those who refuse to amend after they have been warned of their failings. Even if they do not heed my words, good Religious will profit by them. That is why I shall speak, in season and out of season!

*I will command the clouds not to rain on it .....*

9. Today I will finish by reminding you of what Moses said to the Israelites before he died: "What has the Lord not done for you? He has guided you for forty years through the desert and never did you lack food. God himself dictated His Law to you, and made a contract with you. Be true to the conditions of this Covenant, and understand that it is not only for you but for everybody; for those present, the absent, for the people of today and for those to come. I offer you life or death, blessings or curses; choose life so that you and your descendants may live." (*Dent. 29*)

*What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?*

10. My heart appeals to you in the same words, dear daughters, take care never to break this alliance between God and you. Love Him with all your heart, keep His law in every respect. Indeed, doing that, you will be fully alive, and as you enter eternity you will have neither remorse for the past nor fear of the final reckoning.



## CHAPTER 46

### THE PASSING GRACE

*Come Lord Jesus, come,  
live and reign fully in me;  
perfect the work of your grace... St. J. Eudes cf. O.C. 1:439)*

1. The other day, Père Suchet quoted this saying of St. Augustine: "I fear the grace which passes." My dear daughters, if this thought caused that great doctor and light of the Church to tremble, should it not fill us, too, with fear? I can assure you that it overwhelms me, because I feel that neglect of graces will be the principal reproach at the judgement of a Religious. St. Teresa says that grace is so delicate, a breath passing so quickly, that the least inattention can cause us to lose it. One could say that Grace moves continually round us and that it continually tries to find an entrance to our hearts. For example, it prompts us not to say a useless word during silence time, not to retort to an unpleasant remark, to do an act of charity, of obedience and so on; if carelessly, we do not hear this voice which urges us to good, we shall have to give an account of it before God.

*Walk always straightforwardly in  
the Lord's presence.*

2. I hope that all of you are clothed with sanctifying or habitual grace, received first at Baptism and then in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, grace which is lost only by grave sin and which I trust you all cherish with the greatest care. But actual grace is only too easy to lose. In the Imitation of Christ we read that the movements of this grace are easily confused with those of nature. With regard to virtue, nature, is content with little, while grace never says "it's enough". Nature looks for consoling feelings; grace tends to make us die to ourselves and to want God alone, and it never ceases to suggest new ways of practising virtue. Père Surin says. "Grace must fight unwearingly to overcome the tendencies of poor, weak human nature. People who have begun early in life to correspond to the promptings of grace usually arrive at practising virtue without difficulty. It becomes like a natural disposition formed by the habit they made consisting of doing the right thing." Well, dear daughters, I think we can see this truth with our own eyes, because, it seems to me, that you all have this natural inclination to good. If, however, St. Augustine himself could say; "I fear the grace that passes", you, too, should experience this saving fear. Walk always straightforwardly in the Lord's presence, keep your rules faithfully, accomplish your duties as well as you can and God's grace will go with you, dwell in you always.

*Crosses? Let them pass.*

3. Perhaps quite often it happens that we pay no attention to passing graces, but alas, we pay too much attention to the crosses we meet! As there are always plenty of these, they will become even heavier and too weighty to drag along if we make so much fuss about them. Let them pass, dear daughters. Every evening I say, "Perhaps today's cross will not be so heavy tomorrow, maybe it will not even exist!" Sometimes I am mistaken but sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. In allowing us trials the Lord proportions them to our weakness. It is of paramount importance that we do not allow the graces God offers us to slip through our fingers so that, moment by moment, we may win yet more by our fidelity.

## CHAPTER 47

### THERE ARE SAINTS IN EVERY COUNTRY AND FROM EVERY WALK IN LIFE

*How great Thou art! (2 Sam. 7:22)*

1. Recently, dear daughters, Mother Church put the following words on the lips of the faithful: "The Lord is admirable in his works and in his Saints." (cf. *Ps. 67:36*) And only yesterday I read a book entitled: *Acts of Love and Adoration* by St. Teresa in praise of God's works and of the miracles worked by grace in his saints. Like her, haven't we often been lost in admiration at what comes from the Creator's hand? The majestic sights of nature, the sky, the variety of growing things, the diversity of animals and the marvel of their being. Then there is the art and industry of man and the unity-in-diversity of callings which contribute to the order and good of society. And isn't it true that the Lord's wisdom and grandeur can be praised in even the tiniest things? Again, like St. Teresa have we not sometimes been moved with wonder, gratitude and love at the thought of the firmness of the Church, the zeal of the Apostles, the courage of martyrs and of the holy people succeeding each other century after century even to our day? And what of the works, the institutions founded to meet the needs of the times for the glory of God and the salvation of souls? This is why from the fullness of our hearts we have rejoiced and sung with the Church: "God is wonderful in His works and in His saints!"

*Heart (if Jesus, source of life and holiness,  
live in us!*

2. In every century there have been saints. Our first parents were saints. After their sin, they spent long years on the earth doing penance for their fault, working in the sweat of their brow, serving God in sorrow and tears, until they had satisfied Divine Justice. They were admitted to a place of rest to await the promised Saviour who would open Heaven's gate to them. Yes, they were saints, so were the Patriarchs, ever faithful to the law of God. The Prophets were saints. In the early Church the number of saints could never be counted. There are saints in our century too, and every day the Holy City counts new citizens. The Apostle St. John exclaims: "I saw a great multitude which no one could count. They were of every tribe, tongue, people and nation." (*Rev. 7:9*) There are indeed saints in every walk of life, but surely Religious Communities must be the most productive of saintly souls. From the early Church onwards monasteries sprang up, to which virgins flocked, to dedicate themselves to prayer and good works. How many holy men and women have been given to earth and to heaven by different Religious Orders! I hope that our little congregation, barely thirty years old, can however consider many of its members to be among the elect. Oh, yes, we can say with good reason that we have seen saints among the professed sisters, the novices and the postulants. All died with a smile on their lips, rejoicing at the thought of going to Heaven to be with their Divine Spouse. However, dear daughters, I hope you will not be snatched away by death too soon! You will live to work for God and to be our comfort. I love to think you will become so many saints by being faithful to the Rule and to all that is taught you to fulfill the aim of your vocation.

*When will the blessed hour come,  
when you will fill me with your  
Presence and be All in all to me. (Imit. 34)*

3. I have just said that I have seen saints among the postulants and novices; and I cannot refrain from telling you about one whom I shall never forget. She was the sister of the Superior of our house in Algiers, who has also taken flight to Heaven. This dear child arrived here from Munich desperately ill. She had a lung infection and there was no hope of a cure, but she was consumed by the desire to be a Good Shepherd Religious and to die with us. She was so suffering that we admitted her with the greatest anxiety. After a few days, we gave her the holy habit after which she took to her bed. We got the Bishop's permission for her to make her vows. Soon afterwards, she died. I can still see her bed in the infirmary. In her last moments, she was like an angel, her impassioned love for Jesus filled with wonder the hearts of all who saw her. She made fervent acts of love all the time, she couldn't contain her joy, and she burned with longing to be united to God. M. Chalendon told us later that he had proof of this soul's holiness by favours which several people had through her intercession. He added with

due caution, that even if these favours were not strictly speaking miracles, they were at any rate quite extraordinary graces.

*Because she loves me, says the Lord,  
I will deliver her and honour her. (cf. Ps. 91:14, 15)*

4. There is a sentence in Holy Scripture which we need to remember in painful circumstances: "The death of saints is precious in the eyes of God." We see written nowhere else, of all the wonders of God's creation, that there is anything named precious in the eyes of God: on I only the death of saints. And notice it says "of saints", to distinguish it not only from the death of sinners, which is frightful, but also the death of persons who, without being God's enemies, yet did not possess to any great degree the virtues which make saints, but yielded to a certain tepidity. When one speaks of a "precious death" one really means that of fervent souls who flew, so to speak, along the way of perfection, who made little sacrifices, immolating themselves entirely for him, who, out of love, became Victim and Redeemer to save souls. Oh, yes, such a death is to be longed for: it truly is precious in eyes. Such was the death of that young Novice, and such, also the death of her sister, our good Mother Mary of St. Teresa Stransky, Superior of El-Biar; we are all mourning her at this moment. Yes, indeed she died the death of the saints and her soul must be beloved of the Lord! Her life was a continual sacrifice to the glory of God and for souls

At the moment of her arrival on the shores of her Heavenly homeland, Père Suchet, Vicar General of Algiers, said to her with a kind of holy boldness. "Well, dear daughter, you are at the end of your earthly voyage, in sight of your longed-for haven. Would you have the courage to say with the glorious Bishop, St. Martin: "Lord, I am now going to you. However, if you still wish to use me in this world, I do not refuse to go on working for you'?" She replied, "Yes, Father, I would say it immediately, although the delay in uniting myself to my heavenly Bridegroom would be hard." We must admire such generosity and such submission, the result of a life entirely given to doing the will of God.

While she was still a novice how fervent she was! It was a big Novitiate as it is now, and it was difficult for me to see each Novice in private, but I could not forbid myself the pleasure of sending for Mary of St. Teresa for a little talk every week or two, so much did her thoughts and feelings charm and console me.

*What prevents us from becoming Saints?*

5. How the noble examples of these holy souls must encourage you and stimulate you to imitate them! A great many of our Sisters have completed their life's journey pursuing virtue, and are the joy and honour of our Congregation. I hope that this beautiful Novitiate, so dear to the hearts of Jesus and Mary and to mine, will also one day be its glory and support.

It says in Holy Scripture\* "Be holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44) Under the old law it was much more difficult to attain holiness than under the new law, for the Lord hid himself, so to speak, in inaccessible splendour. In the fulness of time, however, the Son of God in becoming a man, was given us as a model in the practice of humility, obedience, selfdenial and every virtue. However, he willed to be ever present Himself, in the Holy Eucharist, where we may find the source of all holiness. So what prevents us from becoming saints? The saints became so I use of this Sacrament for which they prepared ..... selves with special love and which they received with such tender devotion. Aren't we able to do as much with the help of God's grace.

St. Teresa was so on fire with longing to be nourished with the Bread of the Elect that, to have this happiness, she declared she was ready to pass through an army in battle array. As for our dear Superior of Algiers, of whom we were speaking, what yearning and burning love did she not have for this heavenly food! When she was travelling and hoping to receive Holy Communion, she made every effort to keep the fast until even a late hour, however ill or worn - out she might be. Then when they made a halt, she went as quickly as possible to a Church to revive her soul by receiving Him who was her all, never thinking of her weary body. It was by frequent and fervent Communion that she became a saint and that, we are interiorly convinced, she possesses eternal glory with all the other elect.

For you, too, dear daughters, this is an efficacious means of attaining your salvation and being counted among the saints. So may your communions be well made. May your obedience be total and then we shall have the happiness of knowing that there are as many saints among us as there are Novices, young Professed and elderly Sisters!

## CHAPTER 48

### ON THE VIRTUES OF SR. MARY OF ST. ANSELM DEBRAIS, DECEASED AT THE MOTHER HOUSE ON 29TH MARCH, 1840

*Holy and innocent were all her ways,  
Sweet, temperate, unstained;  
Her life was prayer, her every breath was praise  
And so high heaven she gained. (Liturgy)*

1. My dear daughters, we tend to look for dear Sr. Mary of St. Anselm everywhere, don't we? We can't get used to the void she has left among us. But let us think of her in heaven where she is praying for the Congregation and for each one of us, and her happiness will assuage our sorrow. Mary has drawn her to her side, for on earth our Sister mirrored her virtues. Mary of St. Anselm was full of God. What good judgement! What wisdom! What spiritual riches were hidden in this chosen soul! We always compared her to St. Aloysius Gonzaga because of her purity, her angelic devotion, her abandonment to God. We considered her a model religious.

*A soul of pure gold!*

2. In the world, she was a wonderful example by her love of God, her humility, her devotedness to her family of which she was the ornament, the comfort and the refuge. Then, as later in the Convent, she forgot herself while busying herself with the needs of others, and when she did anyone a service she was ingenious at making people think they were obliging her. "Go to bed" she would say to her mother or sisters, "I am staying up a little longer to finish my accounts: in fact I prefer to go to bed rather later: it suits my health at the moment." And when it was a question of avoiding parties or visits: "Oh, I beg you go without me! I feel so grumpy and unsociable. In return I will embroider some collars and caps so as not to be quite useless." By these little sacrifices, which cost young people, she was preparing the way for her vocation.

Not long before entering the convent, she was chatting one day to her director, M. Regnier, the Vicar General, about her attraction for our Congregation, and said to him, humbly: "I am so sinful, perhaps I will taint the Lord's house by my presence ... .. I am not thinking of that", replied the Vicar General, "but of your Mother's tears, and I know she needs your care." "God will help me to overcome the obstacles", she said.

M. Regnier was quite triumphant when he introduced her to us: "I am bringing you a saint, a soul of pure gold.", and he spoke from personal knowledge, having directed her from childhood. Her modest and reserved air gave no hint of her unusual talents. She was very well-educated and knew Latin; English came as easily to her as French, but to listen to her she was quite incapable.

*A living Rule.*

3. In religion she was a living rule. One had only to glance at Sr. Mary of St. Anselm to know what should be done. In the Novitiate she made herself out to be a nonentity and always found others better informed. When her mother asked what she did in the convent, she replied with her usual gentleness: "I am dependent on the Community, but the Sisters are so kind they never make me feel it." "But you were indispensable to us at home." "Ah, mother dear, it was your affection that made you think that!" It is a fact that her family never knew that she fulfilled several charges in the house. During her two years novitiate, which of you could say that you saw her failing in humility, obedience or charity? At recreation she chose the lowest place, always ready to take the blame for other's faults, obedient to the least sign, and ingenious in covering up and excusing her Sisters' failings. On her death bed she was upset to be thought virtuous. "Oh, Mother," she would say to me, "nobody knows me as I really am, only God.

*A soul of discretion.*

4. Again, I would like you to admire and imitate her perfect silence, and in choir, did she ever fidget? No, she stayed absolutely still. In the refectory, she never made a sound. In everything she showed a care that almost amounted to scruple. Shall I speak of her discretion, her prudence, her great considerateness as a secretary? One could say that her left hand never knew what her right hand did. When I dictated some private letter which caused me great pain, she carefully avoided anything that would remind me of it afterwards.

*A soul of humility.*

5. I had made great plans for Sr. Mary of St. Anselm, my secretary and assistant in the Novitiate; with her help alone I could have done without several professed Religious I was planning to send to the Foundations where they are clamouring for Sisters. Without complaining let us say humbly: "Man proposes but God disposes." Her replacement will depend on you, for what can hinder you? I don't say from imitating all her virtues because perhaps none of you is led along the same path, but from imitating, for example, her humility and obedience? Why shouldn't you have as much as she of those virtues? They seemed to be the life of her soul.

Her attention to God made her see her least imperfections. Without doubt she took her vows, pure and intact, before God, she wasn't one of those plants which is dried by the burning wind of pride. She was a flower whose calyx, always open to the morning dew, became fresher and more beautiful each day! Like ships coming from far-off lands, laden with treasure, her soul was filled with virtues.

*Love is kind. (1 Cor 13:4)*

6. And the charity of dear Sister Mary of St. Anselm! Which of you have never experienced its blessed effects? As Assistant in the Novitiate she was only hard and severe towards herself. When I pointed out some shortcoming there she would answer: "I haven't noticed anything, dear Mother. All the Novices are well-behaved. Probably I did something clumsy, the others would never do it." She had such a kind heart that the very thought of giving pain to a Sister, caused her disquiet to the point of being afraid to go to Communion. How she shared in the sufferings of each in order to bring comfort! Like St. Paul, she was all things to everyone to gain all to Christ. I can assure you she was a martyr for everyone, for there was no fault committed, or a Sister suffering the smallest trouble, but she reproached herself for the one or thought she was the cause of the other.

She was so happy to be with you all. She sought the most simple to instruct them, she was contented with those inclined to melancholy, because, said she, their feelings were in harmony with her state of soul. When she was with the younger ones she explained that she needed them to cheer her up. When her duties obliged her to speak to me of some little abuse, she always added: "Dear Mother, it is just thoughtlessness, for the Sister has so many other good qualities!"

*Love always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Cor. 13:7)*

7. Although being so humble, mortified and obedient this Religious was nevertheless tortured by almost unbelievable interior sufferings. Often at Communion time she would come and beg to be dispensed. Then when she had been to Communion in the name of holy Obedience, after her thanksgiving she would come to thank me. In spite of the habitual state of suffering and interior torment which God imposed on her, she was always serene. Such a beautiful life would surely be crowned by a beautiful death. The doctor himself gave this splendid witness: "This holy Religious is totally humble and obedient; she is dying because she is too good to go on living." How consoling that is, but what a treasure we have lost!

We must adore the designs of Providence without trying to analyse them! When I came to tell her to make the sacrifice of her life, her face became rosy and radiant. She faced death not only calmly but joyfully. Her virtue shone with an added lustre during her last illness; always joyful, always patient, she yearned for the moment to leave this earth. Even in her agony she thought she should not ask for some relief during the Great Silence. She felt remorse for even showing that she was thirsty.

Dying, she again offered her sufferings for the apostolates of the Congregation which she passionately loved; she offered them for all our intentions. Her love and devotedness for the Institute was as constant as it was limitless, and she gave us a last proof of this by asking her family to continue their benefactions to the Congregation, so as to repay a little of the gratitude she owed it. And as the family promised to do this, a sweet smile touched her lips. Then when we suggested that she ask God to cure her, conscious only of her longing for heaven yet fearing to disobey, she said: "If you wish it, Mother, if our Sisters want it, but what it costs me!" Then she murmured: "It is so sweet to die!" Soon, bending over her, I said: "Dear child, you are going into the Lord's house." "Oh, yes, Mother, " she replied with an expression of great happiness, and then died.

We shall never forget this humble Religious. We shall, as you have asked, place her heart in a crystal urn in a niche in the cloister with the inscription: "She who humbles herself will be exalted." You will be stimulated by such a beautiful example, and you will remind yourselves how our dear Sr. M. of St. Anselm never chattered as she came and went in the house. So the sweet scent of her virtues will continue to perfume our house, and our successors will learn how Virgins flower in the Lord's enclosed garden.

## CHAPTER 49

### ON THE LOVE OF WORK

*Go, work today in my vineyard. (Matt. 21:28)*

1. Love work, dear daughters; it is the means of ridding yourselves of great temptations. Rather than do nothing, wind wool. Here is a delightful extract from a letter by St. Jerome to a young virgin named Demetriade. I thought it would be apt to read it again with you today:

"After being on your knees, often and for long hours in fervent meditation and prayer, take up your wool and spin, either with distaff or spinning wheel; or gather up what your Sisters have spun, roll it into balls and try to do even more than they have done. If you keep busy with many pleasant little tasks, your days will never drag; and so you will accomplish your salvation and that of your Sisters, and you will safeguard your own and others' chastity, and grow in the eyes of God. Holy Scripture says: 'The soul of the idle person is full of temptations.' (Sir. 33:28) For that reason you must always be busy and prevent yourself from thinking of anything other than serving and pleasing God.

No alms given you are more agreeable to God than what you have gained justly and perseveringly by the honest labour of your hands. You will earn much praise before God if you engage in good works, as much to meet your needs as to give good example to other virgins in fleeing idleness."

Remember that St. Jerome was speaking to proud patrician ladies of the fourth century, bred in the indolence and luxury of that period. Work, beloved daughters, is, as you know, divinely instituted said to Adam: "You shall eat your bread in the sweat of your brow." (*Gen. 3:19*) No one on earth is allowed to live in idleness and so avoid this severe but just sentence. One must always work one way or another. This is something we must make the Novices understand, persuading them that the active life is perfectly compatible with the contemplative life, and that a soul can be raised to the highest degree of contemplation while being very busy.

*We must combine the activities of Martha and Mary.*

2. A hermit visited other solitaries in Egypt, and seeing them working, was astonished and said: "We are not born to engage in such base and worthless tasks; as for me, I meditate and contemplate my Lord and my God. We are created to adore, love and serve Him." Having permission to stay some days with them, the Superior had him shown to a cell and ordered the door to be locked. When dinner time came, the solitary knocked, but in vain, and he had to fast the whole day. He complained to the Superior, who came to see him in the evening. "What!" was the answer: "Isn't eating too base an occupation? I thought your love of God was strong enough to nourish you! As for us, we believe that if we must eat then we must work." These remarks made the solitary think, and he acknowledged his error.

In our Congregation, we must combine the activities of Martha and Mary. Like Martha, let us keep busy on external things and like Mary, never withdraw from the Master's presence. Work like Martha. Can you believe that she did not love our Lord? She is blamed for being too pressured, but if he came here, wouldn't we have done as much as she? In spite of her busyness she scarcely left her beloved Guest. She went, then came back to Jesus, went back to her work and again returned to her dear Master. Seeing that her Sister never left Him, she was almost jealous. Do the same! Lend yourself to your work, but always come back to God.



*Don't be afraid of work.*

3. Beware of fearing work, remember that in our Congregation it is the chief austerity we must practice and that it costs less, immeasurably less, to suffer the hardship of work than the torments of eternal damnation. Understand that our Institute is destined to labour. In our houses, the Mothers must work to feed their children and so we must be ready for anything and not recoil before any work. Let this be the case, especially at the Mother House! Already you all work joyfully, and without minding what employment you are given, understanding that there is no occupation without its value as long as it is done by obedience. All our Foundations are poor, however they appear from the outside and so we must work in all of them. Not one has an income and I am very pleased it is so, because much money is the cause of relaxation in Communities.

*Act for God alone.*

4. Certainly few Religious have worked as hard as Mother de Chantal. She founded a great many monasteries in her lifetime. Apart from her journeys which were frequent, and the works of every kind that were part of her important charge, she wrote letters or other precious manuscripts for the consolation of her daughters; and there are few of her houses which are not proud to possess some of her handwork which they preserve as relics. The articles were destined for the sacristy, because she loved to work for the Church and the Altar. She was nearly always Sacristan, it suited her longing to be nearer the Blessed Sacrament and satisfied her devotion to the Holy Eucharist whence she drew all her energy and spiritual strength. Great souls of prayer accomplish a lot without being flustered. St. Teresa did not get worked up however important her tasks or whatever the difficulties she had to face. She kept her serenity, aware that God worked in her. He will do the same for you, dearest daughters, and He will inspire you fully with the understanding you may need, so long as you, too, love prayer and that you are generous, charitable, pleasant and busy - in a word, that you act for God alone.

*There is no-one who cannot render some service.*

5. Never be lackadaisical or tepid. The want of occupation, and softness were responsible for Solomon ceasing to make good use of the gift of wisdom given him by the Lord. Avoid, above all, being shallow, easy-going and inconsiderate; such behaviour does not merit much for heaven. You must work perseveringly according to your ability and the wishes of your Superiors, without ever being downhearted. In spite of your weakness or the mediocrity of your talents remember that all your strength comes from God. There is no one who cannot render some service, one way or another, in the Lord's vineyard. Every Sister is useful whether in tilling the ground, or cultivating and gathering fruit. Those who spend the day writing, work very hard. They comfort people in need of encouragement, they rekindle the zeal and goodwill of their Sisters. Those who work in the classes also work hard when they endeavour to carry out their duties perfectly. Our Sisters who cook, bake, care for the linen, the habits, the garden, all work very hard. Everyone must do her best because we all live in the Lord's house, and together, with one mind, must contribute to the good of the Community. In the same way, those in charge of the workrooms should be interested in their work; let them not waste time, remembering that time is not theirs, and each time they waste it, it is an offence against their profession of Poverty.

*Let everyone lend a hand somewhere.*

6. If you should ever be in a house where there was no work, you must say, "Well, let's make scapulars, embroider, knit as in the Mother House." However, one must leave no stone unturned to procure work for the girls. Sewing usually suits them best. Sometimes in winter, there is little work for one or two months. What must we do then? Let each Sister give a hand in the difficult household tasks. Some will help in putting the linen room in order, others will work in the Roberie, others will crochet and make other things which will come in useful later. Then we shall find, when Summer comes, we have laid in supplies as the ants do. Now I know that many of you have set your heart on the missions, above all among pagans, but if we don't put by some savings, far from being able to undertake new apostolates, we shall not succeed in maintaining even those already in existence.

*Who will not work, shall not eat. (cf. 2 Thes. 3:10)*

7. The early monasteries in Egypt never accepted anyone who did not wish to work in some way. Sometimes several thousand monks lived by the work of their hands, under the leadership of just one Superior, to whom they handed their earnings for the relief of the poor. At harvest time they even hired themselves out to landowners, in order to be able to give alms to all in need.

You too, my dear daughters, work not for yourselves and your own needs, but to do good to souls. You are industrious and without any care for your own poverty, you give much thought to helping your Sisters and our houses. These charitable projects are the object of your concern, and day and night, I too seek new ways of providing for them. I don't worry about you so long as you are here at Angers, but your Sisters out in the thick of battle, who knows the things they need? Who knows the trouble and privations they have to put up with? So long as a Mother has her children at home, she takes care of them and foresees their needs, but when they have gone to war, she cannot watch over them any longer. Well, that is exactly my situation with regard to my absent daughters. I can't provide them with their daily bread, but I feel a deep need to think of them, and nothing is too costly when I can comfort and help them.

*Never be completely idle.*

8. Do you know what the Holy Father likes about our Institute? It is our love of work, of a laborious life, the fact that none of you fears the pain and fatigue our work entails.

If we cannot do much, let us be content with little, but never be completely idle. Oh! be very careful not to become useless members of the Community by too much concern for ourselves, our well-being, or our health. There are people given to thinking they are ill, and have a thousand imaginary ailments. On account of some trifling discomforts, magnified by their imaginations, they do hardly anything and are a burden to others by their demands. How painful it must be to have to say to oneself, when examining one's conscience: "I am a burden to the Community by my own fault." Given the good will, one can always find something to do.

Even at recreation time, the Novices, as well as the professed, can plan to do something useful. Some can gather vegetables or prepare them, others can do some weeding, sweep the paths and so on. All will try not to be a burden to others. In this way you will relieve our Sisters engaged in heavy work, these will be so grateful to their kindly sisters, and will breathe for them the prayer God loves to hear, the prayer of a comforted soul. Moreover, you will be co-operating in the maintenance of a greater number of girls and women, while acquiring experience in running a house and learning the rules of sound management. I would like all our convents to work in this way. Apart from it being according to thrifty housekeeping, the Sister's health will benefit, for nothing is better for the constitution than exercise. When you carry out your duties with enthusiasm you are only accomplishing the will of God who assigns these to you. When, however, you lend a hand to your Sisters, not only are you faithful to the spirit of the Rule, but you are also practising the evangelical counsels, because you are being charitable to your neighbours.

*When you devote yourself to the good of the Congregation, you extend your zeal to the most distant countries.*

9. If our Rule does not impose many exterior penances on us, we must work hard instead. We must strive to maintain God's house. But what a difference between the work we do and that done by most workmen and poor people! Christian Society Ladies also work much, by clothing the poor and caring for Churches. When you devote yourself to the good of the Congregation you extend your zeal to the most distant countries. When you contribute to the upkeep of the house, you share in the merit of all the good which flows out from that house. A cook who cooks well, a Sister baker who takes care of the flour and makes good bread, an intelligent and devoted Sister gardener, are worth a fortune; a well-managed domain is an immense asset for a convent. Enterprise saves and maintains our houses.

*Graces will never be lacking if we do  
what God asks of us.*

10. When one really loves God nothing is too costly to procure his glory. I ask you, wouldn't you do more for his glory in working to maintain a few more needy girls and women than you would by staying half the day in your room or in Chapel thinking about yourself, even on the pretext of becoming holier? One could say that entire commitment to God and the Congregation is a continual transcendence of self. Happy the Superior who finds this spirit among her Sisters! Strictly speaking, work is not prayer, but it could take the place of prayer when done only with the intention of procuring God's glory. And so, in our Congregation, work holds a very important place. Some work - according to circumstances - should be preferred to a long Retreat. If you were Trappistines, Carmelites or such like, things would be different, but you are Good Shepherd Sisters. St. Paul, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis Xavier and St. Vincent de Paul, did not live the same kind of lives as the Fathers of the desert. They all however, reached a high degree of sanctity by travelling on the way to which they were called.

So work wholeheartedly and without giving up, according to the spirit of your vocation. Help each other, charity will draw down heavenly blessings on your work. I assure you that you will experience the consolation of seeing God's work grow, that work with which, by common consent, you have all cooperated.

## CHAPTER 50

### THE BEES

*Beehives are the symbol of order and union in a Community.*

1. My dear daughters, when I look at you, all so busy and eager at your different tasks, when I think of your zeal, your obedience and the beautiful unity reigning among you, the Mother House seems to me like a beehive where you emulate each other at work and which by your solicitude will, one day, I hope become a large, secure establishment in which future generations will take refuge, using what you will have prepared, being nourished on the fruit of your labours and carrying on the work traced by your example.

Like bees, you are all engaged in gathering nectar from our Religious Life, to form a delicious honey of every virtue. In a hive, there is a queen or mother bee and there are workers and young bees. Isn't it true that here, at the Mother House, there is a Mother bee who loves you tenderly and who is entirely devoted to your happiness? And are there not zealous and hardworking professed sisters who represent the worker bees? And then, a swarm of younger ones, our dear novices, who keep their eyes on the older ones to imitate them, and look forward to having wings so they can take their flight to work? Perfect order reigns in a hive. The mother-bee oversees the whole and forms the new generation, and they all feel grateful towards her. When she goes round visiting the hive a certain number of bees surround her. Others in her path make way respectfully, and several gladly join the group accompanying her. That is an image of the respectful and filial love for the Superior in good communities. That is how it is with us, is it not, dear daughters? While you are all the object of my loving care, I can also say I am the happiest of Mothers because each one of you affectionately seeks to satisfy me with the simplicity of true religious, and to lighten my heavy burden. St. Francis de Sales also says that beehives are the symbol of the order and union in a Community.

*Bees seem unable to survive without working or obeying.*

2. Bees have the instinct to share out the work among themselves, helping each other in a wonderful orderliness and without confusion. First, together they set to work arranging the hive, seeking the necessary materials from all sides, and sometimes from a long way off without ever losing their way. Bees seem unable to survive without working or obeying. May it be so with us. May fidelity to our Rules and diligence in doing the task assigned to you be your blessed life's work. Like so many bees you fly from flower to flower bringing your harvest to the common store. This seems to be the mysterious work that goes on in the hive, everyone engaged for the general good, keeping nothing for herself. Those who are beginning life in Religion, find thousands and thousands of souls will come after us to rejoice in the peace of the Lord, and to work in their turn to prepare a place for their successors.

*Does anyone lack courage or energy?*

3. Do you know what the older bees do to test the young ones who will soon have wings? To make sure that they will be strong and capable of helping, they enclose them in their cells where they were born and leave them. Those who lack courage or energy, stay there and die. But the others, stronger, work so hard with heads and little feet that they succeed in breaking open the waxen cover and emerging. Then the older ones surround them, teach them how to fly and collect nectar. Like young bees enclosed in their cells, we keep the novices in a state of humility, dependence and obedience, obliging them to submit to the Rule and teaching them in what true devotion consists, so that they may really contribute to a Community. When the test is passed successfully, the hive keeps a feast. So with our novices when the Council admits them. The older Religious embrace them, prepare their habits for Profession, prepare flowers to crown them, then the Community leads them to the altar triumphantly.

*The Lord showed me numerous swarms.*

4. When the time comes for bees to emigrate, the ones destined for the new colony take care to prepare provisions, to avoid arriving at their new home without means of survival. The Mother-bee decides where the swarm will settle. When the signal is given, the bees fly off without stopping until they reach their destination. They go over it carefully, clean it and begin working eagerly, observing the same foresight, the same diligence, the same activity, keeping the same rules, the same laws of the hive from which they came and where they were reared. My dear daughters, while in prayer, the Lord showed me numerous swarms leaving this Mother House, and already colonies of new bees await the signal to leave. This going forth will mark the beginning of a sacrificial road. While waiting, pray; and until you are told the destination to which obedience will lead you, lay up stores for the journey; draw plentifully of honey from prayer, be faithful to the advice given you, learn the rules and observances of the Mother House, which you must cherish like your homeland, and you should observe its teachings all your lives.

*Love endures to the end. (1 Cor. 13:7)*

5. My dear daughters, we are living in the finest days of the Institute! You must keep intact its spirit by your fidelity and renew its youth continually, working for the greater perfection of the Mother House is, as it were, the origin of new hives. It is too the centre towards which bees from all countries will come from time to time, renewing their strength in order to perpetuate and spread everywhere this spirit and zeal, obedience and charity which I am so happy to see among you now.

You will understand then, my dear daughters, how necessary it is that this Mother House should always be the model for the others. Several of you will soon take flight. Our wishes and prayers will go with you, and our hearts will be with you wherever you may be. There is no separation when we are as united in bonds of love as we are. "Those who go, stay, and those who stay, go," said St. Francis de Sales to his Visitation daughters, to hearten them when there were partings. Only our bodies go away; hearts stay ever united, and especially so in the Lord for whose love what is most dear is sacrificed. Isn't this so, among us? Could your hearts ever break away? Oh, no! Never! That would mean your death and the death of our dear Institute! You will always be bound together in holy love, remaining strongly united to the Mother House, your support and the common centre of unity. And be quite sure that, as long as this beautiful unity exists, God will never cease to fill it to the full with blessings and favours, for it is written: "When brothers live together in unity ....there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life for evermore." (Ps. 132:4)

## CHAPTER 51

### TO THE NOVICES ON THE VOWS

*To keep your vows intact never give up  
praying from the heart.*

1. I am prepared to believe that you sometimes think that I come back to the same subject too often, that I am always talking about the vows, that I make you too afraid of your obligations. And yet, you should be convinced that I cannot speak too much about them, because what matters is; that you give yourselves wholeheartedly to carrying out your religious obligations.

The fear of not being faithful enough to the commitments you have undertaken is one which should not disquiet you, but only serve as a stimulus to be as faithful as possible to the God to whom you are consecrated. If, after having spoken to you for thirty years on end, I did no more than prevent one fault against them, I should consider it all worthwhile, for the smallest sin so wounds God's heart that to prevent it is a very great good. This is all the more true for, frankly, I cannot say that where the vows are concerned, there is such a thing as a small fault. I am not speaking here of certain infractions of the Rule which do not affect the essence of the vows, but of those which undermine their very spirit. For example, should you fail occasionally in silence by forgetfulness or carelessness, that is not a sin against the vows because such failures are not against the spirit of your religious profession, although they are displeasing to our Lord; (they indicate a certain indifference towards him and he often punishes them by withdrawing a new grace he would otherwise have given us.) But if, after being warned about keeping silence, you fail deliberately in it without any remorse for your disobedience, and if you cause others to copy you, that is a different matter.

Should Novices practise the vows? Yes, and why? As a preparation for practising them exactly after profession. What is more, doing everything as though professed, they share in all the advantages and graces of the community.

Strictly speaking, novices have fewer obligations than professed sisters where the vows are concerned, not having yet made these solemn promises, but when one thinks of the merits they could gain in practising the vows wouldn't it be wrong for them to be indifferent to doing so? And if they persisted in such an attitude, would it be right to admit them to Profession? Notice too, a Professed Sister who failed in the observance of the Rules, limiting herself to avoiding faults against the vows, would certainly have a lesser share in the spiritual benefits of Religious Life than a Novice who faithfully kept them.

*"Whoever breaks through a hedge,  
may be bitten by a serpent. " (Eccles. 10:8)*

2. We could apply this to our vows for they are protected as it were by the double hedge of our Rules and Constitutions. If we fail in the Rule, we are liable to be bitten by the serpent; we run the danger of failing in our essential commitment. I can tell you, also, that Sisters who sin against the vows unfortunately opened the way to doing so by previously ignoring our holy observances. So you will see how necessary it is to be exact in all the observances, and scrupulously faithful to any recommendations.

How could any of you, then, be allowed to say, for example: "I can't submit to my Superior: I don't agree with her. I get on better with so and so." Or, "I feel I can keep this little gift, without failing in poverty. The Community would never be better off for this trifle. I can keep books bound in fine leather, or covered in silk or velvet. It won't affect the Community because my family gave them to me." Or, "I can't make up my mind to go to such and such a house." Or, again, "I can't do any real good here etc. etc." Doesn't it seem to you that Religious who could talk like that would not have really understood the weight of their obligations: that they would evince a deplorable shallowness in estimating the value of the Religious Profession, and, again, that they would be breaking their vows?

A vow is a promise made freely to God and which is pleasing to Him. Having made it freely, however, we must not fail in it. Whoever breaks the vows, breaks their word to God himself and

commits the sin of sacrilege. Open the Book of Numbers and read: "If you are bound by a vow or an oath to God do not break your word, but accomplish all you have promised." (Num. 33:3)

*The faithful observance of the vows  
is in itself a homage of prayer  
rising before the Lord.*

3. Notice, dear daughters, that where a vow is concerned no substitution is acceptable. One must do what was promised: the Lord exacts fidelity to the given word which is sacred. Pagans, even, consider it blameworthy to fail in fidelity to the Divinity. If we should, unfortunately, leave the right path, if we were on the verge of disaster, nothing would save us but to lean on the strength of the Institute, and to cling to our promises made before the Lord. Above all, it is prayer that will help us to keep our vows; it draws down blessings on an entire house and indeed on a Religious Order. The people of God had nothing in the desert. Moses prayed, and lo! water flowed from a rock, and manna fell from heaven. Joshua prayed, and stopped the sun in its course. If you want to keep your vows intact, never give up praying from the heart. Remember, too, that the faithful observance of the vows is, in itself, a homage of prayer, which rises before the Lord and is very pleasing to him.

*You have made known to me the path of life,  
you will fill me with joy in your presence. (Ps. 16:11)*

4. Never be ungrateful or you will cease to be happy. On the contrary let gratitude be the motive of your actions! But if you must never forget to be thankful to people, how much more should you be to God who has chosen you to be his spouses. Thank Him every day, constantly renew your acts of gratitude. Tell him how happy you are to be his chosen ones.

I hope for everything from a Religious who loves her vows, and I fear everything for another who is not glad to have made them. The good you do in the groups will be in proportion to your love of your vows, for our girls only respect the Sisters who clearly cherish their vocation. Sometimes it is enough for one of them to hear how happy the Sisters, are in their Religious Life, to be led to conversion. I have as much consolation in assisting on her death bed a Religious who has always loved her vows as I am anxious for another whom I know did not value her vocation.

A Jesuit Religious, young in age and profession was dying. His Superior visited him and asked him if he was suffering from any difficulty or anxiety. At this the dying man began to laugh. Astonished, the Superior questioned him on the cause of his joy. "Haven't I good reason to be happy?" was the reply. "Since I had the good fortune to pronounce my vows, my life has been one act of thankfulness, and now that I am going to God, I have no anxiety!" Yes, at the hour of death, let us offer our vows as inviolate as when we pronounced them. This should make us think seriously. Our judgement will be very searching; and woe to the tepid soul! Bossuet says: "flow awe-inspiring for a Religious to stand alone before God. He will have to give an account of all he has read, of all the Conferences heard and the good advice offered him." So let us examine ourselves; sometimes quite slight faults are at the root of considerable troubles later.

*My heart is ready, O God. (Ps. 57:7)*

5. I would like the postulants who are listening to me to begin to prepare for the great day of their profession. We are told in Scripture that the young girls from whom King Assuerus would choose a wife, spent a year in preparation for their presentation to their Sovereign. So, what can we say about the care taken before becoming Brides of Christ? Let the postulants and novices begin to live the vows, as from today! Let them cultivate in their souls the beauty of Divine Grace by the constant practice of virtue! In this way, they can be sure that presenting themselves to the King on their Profession day, they will receive his love, the title of Bride and a queen's crown - a title and crown they will bear eternally in heaven, if here on earth, they were faithful to their Beloved.

*Kiss the chains of your Vows!*

6. Oh, how happy we are, dear daughters, to be so united to our God forever. Thank him continually for a gift that, even in this life, brings us such consolation! There is nothing more noble

than to be bound so closely to Jesus. Let us kiss the chains of our vows with delight, and beg the Most High to bind us ever closer to him. That is what I want most and it makes me happy to see that you love and are happy in your vocation.

May the Lord strengthen our Institute and make it last, and may it be a seed - ground for souls who will spread the good odour of Christ around the world.



## CHAPTER 52

### TO THE NOVICES - ON POVERTY

*Blessed are the poor in spirit. (Matt. 5:13)*

1. The vow of Poverty, dear daughters, was born at the same time as the Church. The first Christians sold their goods and brought the price to the Apostles to be put in common. It was the period of first fervour and the prototype of religious life, where each brings what God has given her, and then receives with gratitude what has been judged appropriate to her needs without imagining that more is her due.

*You must try to live in the world  
as though not of it. (St. J. Eudes O. C. 1: 177)*

2. You must know that, after Profession, you may not keep any of your worldly goods for your own use, nor may you dispose of anything without the Superior's permission. If you have very little and yet you are received, in conscience you should give the little you have. The more the consideration shown by the Community in this matter, the more you should respond in the same way. You may not make your family the smallest gift of money without permission. You know the terrible punishment of Ananias and Saphira who lied to St. Peter, assuring him that they had not kept back anything from the proceeds of a piece of land. They both died. Yes, dear daughters, there are Religious in Hell for having sinned against the Vow of Poverty.

Our Constitutions oblige us to a perfect renunciation of everything. If you were to lose or break an object of some value by inadvertence, you would be guilty of carelessness, but it would not be a fault against the vow. But if you took a fancy to accepting a gift, or to give one without permission that would be a sin against Poverty. Your fault would be more or less grave according to the value of the article in question and the circumstances. We are obliged to observe Poverty in our rooms and everywhere; and even some possessions you might obtain from your Superior will not absolve you from the fire of Purgatory.

*An anxious heart weighs a man down. (Prov. 12:25)*

3. Economy is part of the vow of Poverty, but not a mean economy, for example, regarding food. Far from being a virtue it would be a fault; in not providing sufficient food one injures health. If you are orderly, you will never be reduced to such wretchedness. Yes, be orderly! Even if you were a Princess, you should give a good example of it. Disorder can bring about the closure of houses. You have to govern people without order, how can you if you do not have it yourselves? Be very prudent concerning the interests of the house, but don't be worried. Jesus said: "Look at the birds in the sky: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into hams, and your heavenly Father feeds them. See how the wild flowers grow: they neither sew nor spin yet I assure you, Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (Matt. 6:26-28) Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice and everything will be added to you." (Matt. 6:33) So we must put ourselves unreservedly in the hands of God.  
*Never be preoccupied about yourself.*

4. Two things are very detrimental to a Religious House: too much money and too great poverty. However if you are very poor put your trust in God. We have not always been as we are now at Angers. One Pentecost Monday we had only a few apples and pears, and neither soup nor bread. At one time we used to get up at four in the morning to make up bundles of vegetables which we sold to have something to live on. We used to hoe and till the gardens and Providence never abandoned us. Once, one of Mme. d'Andigne's relatives sent us a mattress, into one corner of which she had kindly slipped one thousand francs, and that was a great help.

I recommend to you not to have a mania for storing up. Buy only provisions you can pay for. I so want to fill you with a horror of debts that I would gladly come back to this subject every day. It is not practising Poverty to hold on to books, to wear only one habit without mending it, or a new veil better than other Sisters. Those who encourage these sorts of needs are far from loving our Lord's destitution, or of imitating the Apostles who left everything to follow Him. So let us have no

attachments, and know how to do without even necessities. Would you like to know, dear daughters, how never to lack anything? Never be preoccupied about Yourself, and others will care for you.

*Things can be cords which bind our hearts.*

5. Peace and plenty are blessings flowing from the vow of Poverty when it is practised with total trust in God. To receive these blessings, however, one must have no attachments. Be careful not to collect a pile of medals and pictures; one can be attached to these as to anything else, and they can be cords which bind our hearts. During my Novitiate they never allowed me anything extra, I couldn't have any more pins than those I was using. One day before my clothing I wrote to ask for prayers. "And why should you want people to pray for you more than for anyone else?" said they, and the letter was immediately torn up. Once, having chosen a book I thought would be helpful for my retreat, they took it off me saying that my retreat shouldn't depend on a book. They granted me only one favour during my Novitiate, that of pronouncing my vows at Chapter, one year before my Profession. "Never will I refuse to allow you to strip yourself of everything." said our Mother, when I asked this favour.

So be convinced that you will find true riches in Poverty and he who possesses nothing has everything, because God is taking care of his life.

*Cast all your anxiety on Him  
because He cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:7)*

6. Saint Francis of Assisi said to God: "Lord, it is for you that I possess nothing, and so you owe me everything." Make it your practice to be attached to none of the little things allowed for your use and to have only the strictly necessary. Remember that your vocation is too sublime for you to be grovelling on the ground! Take your flight, as Religious should, and learn how to correspond with God's designs for the Institute.

## CHAPTER 53

### TO THE NOVICES - ON OBEDIENCE (1)

*Our vow of Obedience is like  
the Column of Fire leading  
the Israelites through the desert.*

1. In Holy Scripture, dear daughters, the Holy Spirit tells us what we also have in our Constitutions: "The Obedient man shall speak of victory." (*Prov. 21:28*) Yes, indeed, if you are obedient everything in our Religious Life will be easy. In the first place, you will preserve this vocation, and that means you will work more effectively for souls. If on the contrary, you don't possess the true spirit of obedience, you will never accomplish anything, in spite of whatever other talents you may have; rather you will be a burden to your Superiors. Your spirit of faith in obeying, will make you wonder workers! By obedience alone you will reach the heights of perfection. The vow of obedience comprises the other religious vows. In the first Religious Orders they took no other, so sure were they that, if Obedience were well observed, the others would be also; and in fact, so long as this vow was faithfully kept, the ancient monasteries retained their first fervour and the exact observance of their rules. Our vow of Obedience is like the Column of Fire leading the Israelites in the desert. They advanced when it moved ahead and they stopped when it stopped.

*Obey simply, like children.*

2. While still a novice I felt such a great attraction for Obedience that, after one year of Novitiate, our Mother allowed me to make the vow and wear the silver heart. Since then, I love the virtue even more. One day the life of St. Dositheus was being read in the refectory and it described how another religious in the monastery saw him raised high in glory, because he had practised obedience so perfectly. During dinner my tears flowed watering my bread, and I clearly saw the beauty of this virtue; from that moment I was filled with a desire to practise it faithfully. Indeed I am sure that it is only owing to obedience that I have preserved my vocation. So, if you wish to persevere, always obey, do whatever you are told, obey simply, like children. Obedience must be the Novice's favourite virtue for they must be guided by it alone. I hope for everything from an obedient Novice, even if she has other failings. But another, full of qualities, but not enthusiastic about obedience, will always have me trembling for her Vocation.

*May God keep us from doing our own will  
and give us the grace to understand  
that we have no other business in this world  
than to do in all things and everywhere  
His will, with a great heart and a ready mind. (St. J. Eudes O.C 10:537)*

3. Obedience is our means to holiness. St. Francis Xavier recommended to Superiors nothing so much as to form subjects to Obedience. Don't be self-willed, be indifferent regarding choice of work; learn to submit your judgement, do yourself some violence and the thing ordered will become easy with God's help.

Obedience will prepare you wonderfully for the carrying out of God's plan for your soul. Those of our Sisters who have accomplished most for the Congregation are the most obedient ones. Don't prefer your views to those of your Superior, which is sheer pride. Don't examine or weigh motives when you are told to do something, but simply obey. If the Superior is mistaken, she is responsible, but you will have nothing to answer for. In so doing you are preparing for a future of spiritual fruitfulness. You will count conversions, because the Spirit within you will enlighten you and you will teach only what you have practised.

When I went to Bourges, I met a holy Religious, known for his wisdom and experience. He said to me: "Humble your Religious, turn them inside out if necessary; mould the Novices, in a word, teach them to obey immediately, without reflecting, without self-love, like a dead person who can be moved without any resistance. Then, yes, only then, your congregation will be in a perfect condition. What could you do with someone who never learnt this pliancy? Never tell me that she is

fundamentally good, for I would retort that she was worth nothing, and that anyone who understood the paramount importance of her vows so little could only be a rotten fruit!"

*Be prepared to obey always and  
you will have the true Spirit of Love. (S.M.E.)*

4. Could you still be ignorant about the vow of Obedience after so many instructions? How sternly you will be judged if you do not profit by all you have heard! In entering the Religious Life, you will give your will to God by vow so why take it back? It would be as bad as giving someone a precious, longed-for gift and immediately snatching it back! Remember, dear daughters, that the infraction of your vow of Obedience will make you unhappy, but you will always be happy if you obey. Oh, how beautiful is our state of life which obliges us to obey, and makes it our principal duty!

So, my dear daughters, be as obedient as the Novice to whom the Superior said jokingly, "Jump into this well!" and who was quite prepared to do it. I am not saying you must throw yourselves into wells and be drowned; but I am saying, indeed, I order you to throw yourselves into the depths of humility and obedience: there you will save your souls, life, and the purity of your three other vows, offering them to God at your judgement for, I repeat, obedience is the safeguard of all your obligations.

The Jews in captivity, on Babylon's river bank, sang, "O Jerusalem, if I should forget you may my right hand wither and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" (Ps. 137: 5) Well, say the same thing, "O Obedience, if I should ever forget you . . . . ."

## CHAPTER 54

### TO THE NOVITIATE - ON OBEDIENCE (11)

*As the ivy clings to an oak,  
so we must cling to obedience  
to become holy.*

1. We shall speak again today of Obedience, and go on speaking of it, because it is absolutely essential for you to possess this virtue: without it the Religious Life is impossible. As the ivy clings to an oak and grows up into the branches so, dear daughters, a religious must cling to obedience to become holy. Consider St. Stanislaus! He apparently did nothing extraordinary, but became a great saint after only ten months of Novitiate because of his perfect Obedience. The vow of obedience comprises the three others, because to practise the virtue suffices to make us fulfil all our obligations. I have seen novices worry about the vow of poverty, fearing not to be able to keep it: they didn't understand that it is easy enough to detach oneself from things and to be content with just the necessary. It is rather the vow of obedience which should worry us, because that is of limitless scope and one can fail in it in a thousand ways.

*Abraham simply obeyed.*

2. Abraham's sacrifice is the finest model of the sacrifice of Religious life. If Isaac had not willingly allowed himself to be bound, if he had resisted, and if Abraham had not been so generous, what happened would not have happened; and neither Abraham nor Isaac would have had such merit. Abraham questioned nothing, he did not make objections to God's command, he didn't suggest a place for the sacrifice other than that indicated by the Lord. He simply obeyed. You must do the same: submit to God's will, obeying uncritically, generously, and your souls will reap a wealth of happiness from so doing.

A while ago, a saintly missionary was sent to Africa to sustain a mission, with only one companion. The Provincial had said to him: "You will be two, that will be enough." Those words were sufficient for him. He undertook his difficult task among a large number of natives, the work was crushing but he took courage by often saying to himself his Superior's words: "You will be two, that will be enough." Soon he died, a martyr to obedience and victim of his devotedness, because he went so far as to forget his own needs in giving spiritual nourishment to his neophytes.

*Prompt obedience is the strength  
of the Generalate.*

3. Have the same self-forgetfulness and the perfect obedience which will prevent you worrying about where you will be sent. Be ready to leave the day after, or even the very day of your nomination, whatever your destination. This prompt obedience is the strength of the Generalate, for what use would it be to have one, if one couldn't send subjects here and there without having to be very circumspect and diplomatic! You must understand, our Institute can only survive by obedience. If you are not ready to obey promptly you will be really miserable, because you will be forever dreading an order to do something which displeases you! It is told of Father Lainez that, after conferring with Cardinals, among whom he was a light, one would find him at the Roman College washing up. It was humility and obedience which made him do seemingly servile tasks and which contributed to making him a shining light, not only for the Society of Jesus, but for the whole Church.

*O God, teach me to do your will. (Ps. 143:10)*

4. I would wish that mortification, prayer and a lot of devotedness would distinguish our Congregation, but above all obedience. What would you do, dearest daughters without this virtue? A sister, whom I saw recently, learnt, by a beautiful experience, the worth of the vow of obedience. She was destined for one of our houses but felt such repugnance at the prospect, that she begged me to dispense her from going. I told her that she could stay here and someone else would replace her. A few hours later she was back asking the favour of going to the house in question. Fearful of failing in Obedience, she had lost her peace of soul and her serenity. I agreed to let her go, and she is now

happier than ever, a joy to her Superior, who cannot thank God enough for the help she is in the convent.

*In his will is our peace. (Dante)*

5. Dear daughters in speaking of obedience, I must mention the response one of our dying Superiors gave to the chaplain, who asked for her opinion on her successor: "Father I'm not troubled now about earthly things and even less about what is none of my business. The only thing a Religious should care about is to live and die in Obedience!" That shows us what preoccupies a soul about to embark on her last journey! Only Obedience will allow us to make the crossing in peace, without remorse. Believe me, everybody has to obey, and often those, who seem the least obliged to do so, are the most obedient! Our Institute is founded in a special way on simple and uncritical obedience. Often one disobeys with no evil intention, but why do religious fall after keeping up for a certain time? It is because their will is not dead. For a superior who sees one of her Sisters habitually giving in to the habit of disobeying, and has to leave her to do her own will, this is a great suffering. Such religious poison the Superior's life and destroy the reign of grace in their own souls. A fitting judgement would be a fiery probe reaching down to hell, for nobody can reason with someone who holds so stubbornly to her own ideas.

The most pleasing sacrifice to God is our will. "What created hell?" asks St. Bernard. "It was incorrigible self-opinionatedness." Take note of this; when the devil wishes to make a novice give up her vocation, he begins by inducing her to be wedded to her own opinions, and so to commit some fault against obedience. Be on the alert for the malicious wiles of the evil spirit, to the tricks he gets up to for your downfall. Unfortunately there are weak souls whom he twists and turns as he likes, driving them helplessly back and forth like children playing ball!

*See to it that the light within you  
is not darkness. (Luke 11:35)*

6. A Religious, who obliterates the vow of obedience from her heart, will save her soul only with difficulty. She will move in a kind of half light leading to total darkness. Her own obduracy will blind her and she will be lost. Listen to what God said to Moses regarding his complaining people: "So long as they were sinning against me, I have forgiven them; today they are against you: they will all perish!" (cf. Exod. 16) Actually, it is more difficult to prevent murmurings against Superiors than against God. Such a religious would be horrified at a thought against the Faith and yet would complain against her Superior, because the latter has nothing striking about her, and she is subject to common human failings. Some Jesuits having written to their Superior General complaining that their newly-appointed Superior was too young, received the following answer: "You will keep the Superior I have given you and you will try to adapt yourselves to him!" Even if your Superior should order you to do something you are sure to fail in, you must not refuse. Imitate your queen, the Blessed Virgin; try to be worthy of her love and her name which you bear, by submission to the orders given you.

Act, live, go forward and gain strength from obedience and you will experience that deep peace which can only come from this virtue. I will keep on telling you: "Obedience must be the very marrow of your soul!"

## CHAPTER 55

### TO THE NOVITIATE

*Be faithful unto death and I will  
give you the Crown of Life. (Apoc. 2: 10)*

1. My dear daughters, pray much for our dear Novitiate which is really doing well, but which I would like to see doing even better. By our Lord's grace, our Congregation is like a tree, now bearing fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit: its works are there for all to see. I venture to say that we could have among us Teresas by prayer, Francis Xaviers by zeal and obedience, Madaleine de Pazzis by love, but will any faithless sheep emerge from this great flock, intent on ravaging the fold? I seem to hear each of you saying: "Not 1, Lord!" That is all very well, but I must warn you not to count too much on your present good dispositions. Today you are good, but perhaps tomorrow you will no longer be so. In a moment you could lose all you have acquired.

*In all your ways acknowledge God  
and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:6)*

2. Be convinced, dear daughters that two or three disloyal spirits among us could taint all of you. Learn from Lucifer: how many celestial beings did he not drag down with him when he rebelled against God! So who wouldn't tremble for her human frailty, seeing that those mighty spirits created to serve the Lord, were not faithful and were condemned to hell? If even you suspect that such a crooked-minded person is at work, flee, as one does from a snake. Rest for a moment on a grassy bank and it bites you when you least think of it! So never hesitate to distance yourself from companions who would corrupt your Religious innocence. Let them see that their talk disturbs you and perhaps you would make them think seriously about their own attitudes. I knew a non-cloistered community where the Superior one day told the headmistress to take the boarders for a walk. An assistant mistress, who was accompanying her, sidled up and murmured with a malicious smile: "Oh! if this goes on we shall progress rapidly in the interior life!" The first Sister, looking steadily at her, said aloud, "Sister, I hope you are speaking without thinking; if not I would find your remarks odious!"

*Resist once! Resist twice! ... , don't ever give in!*

3. As for me, I admit that people like that make me afraid. I detest those little groups of persons who grumble and criticize; a result of small-mindedness, of ambition or egoism. Oh, dear children, take care not to give way to such faults for I should be most distressed.

When you are told to do something don't listen to the human reasoning of our poor human nature, and always maintain the lovely simplicity of Religious Life, a simplicity which I am happy to see, generally speaking, in all of you. Look on anyone who attempts to rob you of this virtue as a devil. I would rather see him in your rooms where he would do less harm than a disloyal companion. Oh, yes, when he can count on a Sister's collaboration, what terrible damage he can cause!

When it is a question of obedience, be very firm. Steadily resist any attacks you may meet, one way or another. Resist once, resist twice, and don't give in the third time either, or rather, don't ever give in for the crown will only be given to those who are faithful to the end.

*The story of the man of God from Judah. (1 Kgs. 13)*

4. On the same subject, here is a striking example from Holy Scripture: a prophet of Judah was sent to Jeroboam, King of Israel with the express order from God to eat nothing in that country, not a bite of bread, not a drop of water! This mission once accomplished, he must return by another road, never retracing his steps. So, his errand done, he prepared to leave, as he had been ordered. Now, Jeroboam was angered by the prophet's forthrightness and wished to keep him forcibly. He stretched out his hand telling his guards to take him, but God himself intervened. The King's hand withered and he could not move it until the Prophet had prayed to the Lord for his cure. Jeroboam then tried to win him with wonderful promises, and invited him to dinner. The prophet, however, courageously refused all his offers saying: "O King, even if you gave me half your Kingdom, I shall not go with you, nor shall I

eat any bread nor drink any water in this place, because the Lord has expressly forbidden me to do so." So, there we see the prophet twice victorious! God had protected him against attack.

Now, this man who had resolutely refused honours and gifts, will he win a third victory, or will he let himself be taken off his guard, and disobey the Lord's order on impulse? As you will see that is just what happened; and you will understand how important it is to obey exactly and not act thoughtlessly. It wasn't a wicked man who led astray this servant of the Lord, no it was a prophet of Israel, aged, living at Bethel, and very anxious to meet his brother prophet. Having ascertained which road the latter had taken, he mounted his donkey and followed, hoping to catch up with him. In this he succeeded because the prophet from Judea was so exhausted and hungry, that he had to sit in the shadow of a turpentine tree to rest awhile. The old prophet, seeing him like this, ran up to him and, full of compassion, said to him with friendliness: "Come to my house and have a little bread to give you strength." "I cannot turn back", replied the man of God, "I will not eat any bread nor drink any water in this place, because the Lord has expressly forbidden me to do so." "I know that", answered the other, "for I am a prophet too." Then, having recourse to a lie to persuade the man of God, he added: "An angel said to me in God's name: 'Take him home with you so he can have some bread and water.' "

The prophet should have suspected that the old prophet was lying, for the Lord's orders were quite definite; and God does not lead men astray, but he didn't think, and accepted the old prophet's invitation. He returned to Bethel and ate and drank. Well, to punish this disobedience, which one could say was almost involuntary, on his return journey he was killed by a lion. Doubtless, he accepted death with perfect submission and in a spirit of penance. He had already been warned by God through the prophet of Israel, who, with no evil intention, had been the cause of this sin and was therefore himself culpable.

*Be firm in little as in big things.*

5. So you see, dear daughters, how important it is not to be taken in but to continue faithful to the end. And, notice, that it is not wicked people only who can be a stumbling block and lead us astray, but good people, with perhaps the best of intentions, can induce us to fail in obedience and the spirit of the Institute.

You must not believe that every zealous and virtuous person has received a mission from God to direct your conduct. Each one must remember that she has solemnly made her vows before God and the Church. No one can go astray so long as she remains under the direction of the one God has chosen to guide her, for that Superior will never turn her from the right path. If any house has a particular problem, then let it seek guidance from the fountain head, the Superior General; and so the Spirit of the Congregation will continue to emanate in all its purity from the centre to every part. But if some people tend to adopt every idea, or any advice that seems good to them, what will happen is that, with contrary counsels, there will be different practices and, in the end, sins against the Rule and vows. It could even happen that you Would abandon your vocation to embrace another which, on hearsay, seemed better. So, see to it that you cherish in your heart what you have learnt from the beginning. The Apostle St. Jude says: "The Lord has bound with everlasting shackles the angels who lost their primal dignity and left their real home." (cf. *Jude* 6) Couldn't we suffer a similar fate, if we fell away from our vocation and left our spiritual dwelling? Remember what happened to Moses for just one infidelity - God let him see the promised land, but he was not allowed to enter it.

Persevere in your present good resolutions, and as you grow older, stay firm. Be firm in little as in big things. It seems that God leaves monasteries to themselves when they become relaxed.

*You are his coadjutors .....*

6. Such consoling thoughts came to me this morning! What was our holy founders' motive in establishing this house? The glory of God and the salvation of souls. I believe that this end has been achieved, for never have our girls shown holier dispositions than during this retreat. How many souls who were under Satan's control are now pure and absolved from their sins! Doesn't that comfort you? What a beautiful apostolate! You have not become a religious just to save your own souls. The Lord has given you a spiritual family, with children to convert, and if you fail in this you will be responsible, not only for yourselves, but for those souls, lost because of your lack of correspondence with God's



plans. He chose you as his coadjutors and offered you special graces, but he asks for your co-operation in becoming holy. He expects great fidelity on your part.

*Have total trust in God*

7. Go straight forward turning neither to right nor to left because your adversary the devil is lying in wait like a lion seeking for someone to devour. He was clever enough to make Adam and Eve sin in their earthly paradise: he induced Judas, one of our Lord's own disciples, to commit the most terrible crimes, he even dared to tempt Jesus himself. What more can one say? Which is the Religious house he would respect and not attempt to upset? And do you imagine, dearest daughters, that he will leave you in peace while you are resisting his influence? So fight on with courage and never give in to him. Should you lose a single foundation through your fault the souls you have abandoned will cry vengeance on you. Be afraid of your weakness, yes, but have total trust in God, and he will be with you, never doubt it. According to Isaiah: "Those who trust in the Lord will fly like eagles and run without wearying." (Is. 4:31)

Never be discouraged whatever difficulties you have in overcoming yourself, whatever suffering you may have to bear, and see to it that your faults do not stand in the way of our Lord's help.

*Be merciful to me, O lord,  
for I am faint. (Ps. 6:12)*

8. Lately, I received a letter from one of our Sisters who when she left for her mission was full of courage. Now, encountering real difficulties, unable to cope with them and quite disheartened, she implores us to send her to another house. Her Sister, also a Religious, hearing about this, took it on herself to answer the letter. She said, "Dear Sister, if you are so weak as to leave the mission entrusted to you, be fearful for your own soul. Our Mother will recall you for she is too good to let you eat your heart out with discouragement. But afterwards you will be filled with remorse. (11 According to the Evangelist, "If the salt of the earth becomes insipid and loses its flavour, what will make it salty again? It is only fit to be thrown away and trodden on by passers by." (Matt. 5:13) And what else can a Good Shepherd Religious be who is without courage and obedience, but salt without flavour, only fit to be rejected by God?

*Be faithful!*

9. Theologians tell us that the Lord apportions special graces, to the place and work to which he calls a person. If we are not faithful in carrying out carefully the particular apostolate he assigns us, if we have the misfortune to leave the road he wants us to take, we are in danger of losing these special graces and to become lost in a maze of troubles; and it is not without reason that we exhort you to be faithful always and in everything. Be faithful to God, living and working only for him, and offering him all you do. Be faithful to those who have charge of you, carrying out your duties and not adding the slightest weight to those they already bear. Be faithful to your Sisters, by your example, and by your help, never causing them pain, behaving kindly and affectionately and just as a Bride of Christ should. Be faithful to our dear penitents, orphans and all our children, being prodigal of care for them, in zeal and love. Be faithful to yourselves in corresponding with God's graces, endeavouring each day to make progress on the path of holiness. Finally, be faithful to the Institute which has welcomed you, and in which you will find salvation. By your energy and good sense increase its good works, die in its arms and be sure that you will, in the end, gain the victory, the palm and the crown.

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1. This Sister remained faithfully at her post and died full of good works.

## CHAPTER 56

### TO THE NOVITIATE: THE INTERIOR LIFE, LOVE OF THE CROSS, SUFFER AND BE SILENT.

*A talkative person is not really recollected*

1. My dear daughters, the interior spirit and a love of the Cross, are absolutely necessary. You can no more live a spiritual life, without an interior spirit than a fish can live out of water. So I beg you to learn how to live an interior life during your Novitiate. How I would love to see St. Teresas in our Convent! This saint never for an instant lost her awareness of the presence of God. That does not mean that she was gloomy or introvert. On the contrary she was the most cheerful and kindly person in the Community. One can be cheerful without being noisy and inattentive. Make a habit of talking quietly. A talkative person is not really recollected. I wouldn't say to any of you: "You will never do any good", but that I'm afraid that you will not do it unless you are leading an interior life. Your Novitiate is the richest time of your life: it is worth gold and priceless diamonds! Be like the ants; lay up the provisions you will need in the coming winter, so you will be preparing the glorious reward God holds for fervent souls.

*When we offer our crosses to God,  
we experience great peace and  
they become lighter.*

2. Joined to interior recollection must be a love of the Cross for the one cannot exist without the other. A Good Shepherd Religious should imitate our Lord above all in times of suffering; to work for the salvation of souls and to suffer are one and the same thing. When you asked to enter the Novitiate you did it willingly and were aware that it would not be easy. At the beginning God usually gives consolations, this proves his love and mercy, because, if he revealed the future, we would be frightened. At present you are in heaven, everything is easy, you have scarcely anything to suffer. When, however, you are in a foundation you will sometimes have heavy crosses to bear. Don't imagine that crosses trouble our conscience or deprive us of peace. Oh! no, far from it! Rather, when we offer them to God, we experience great interior peace and they become lighter. So, if you cannot put up with slight opposition or a small humiliation now, how are you going to manage later on? For this reason, during your Novitiate, make a habit of practicing religious virtue, of embracing your little crosses, so that you may merit God's help to bear with courage, patience and joy the crosses which await you

*There is no happiness on earth  
except in doing the right thing.*

3. How dreadful if you were good and virtuous only at the Mother House, if on leaving it, you became so careless and selfish that you lost all trace of the spirit of our Institute! Such conduct would be disastrous for you and the Congregation. In the Novitiate you are trained with anxious care solely that later on you may be able to uphold our houses, of which you will have to be both steward and example.

Do what you do only for God! You will not always have someone to watch over you from morning till night, nor to lead you back to your duty. As I've said before, a Sister is usually plagued all her life by the faults she refused to correct in the Novitiate. There is no happiness on earth except in doing the right thing, so be very faithful. I pray constantly that the Novitiate may uphold the holiness and honour of the Congregation; that can come about only by striving towards charity and humility. Where obedience sends you, where there is poverty to be lived, where there are many souls to save, there you should find true happiness. After the battles, Heaven!

*Christ has turned all our sunsets into sunrises. (St. Clement of Alexandria)*

4. If you had to choose between two foundations, one poor and the other in easier circumstances, your heart should choose the poorer one. You know Congregations are always born in

pain. Our great benefactresses, our regretted Sisters Marie-Chantal and Marie Thérèse de Couespel, who, once professed, had given all their wealth to the house, were poorer than anyone else. The latter, on her way to founding a new house, had to hire a soldier's mattress to sleep on, and used old newspapers as handkerchiefs. But that didn't trouble her, because she loved her vocation. Not to love your vocation would constitute a definite bar to your profession. To be able to cope with struggles and sufferings one must love one's vocation much.

I must let you know that our vocation is not all plain sailing! It is marked by difficulties, darkness and sometimes shame because of the poor souls we are trying to save; but at the moment of death, more than during our lives, how beautiful all that will seem! When dying why shouldn't we be at peace if we have always striven to do God's will! A Religious who has loved only God, has worked only for him, will have no regrets. How insignificant the greatest sacrifice will then seem! Why is it that one sees so clearly in death? Surely because the soul is already leaving its mortal condition, and by the light of God who comes, glimpses the extent of its obligations. Oh the bliss enjoyed by Good Shepherd Religious in heaven! The generosity with which they spurned earthly vanities to give themselves to the service of their Divine Master will fill them with joy and thanksgiving! The greater their sufferings, the greater their reward!

*In troubles as in consolation keep on thanking God*

5. If these thoughts help you to appreciate crosses and sacrifices, you will soon be perfect religious, capable of going to the ends of the earth to save souls. So welcome the crosses that come your way, don't be afraid of them, one cannot accomplish great things without hard work and many trials. A Good Shepherd Religious never gives up on her way of the Cross, never says that's enough! In troubles as in consolations she keeps on thanking God. Remember that the Institute is founded on the Cross and on a love of our Rules and Observances; it is like the Angel in the Apocalypse, who with one foot on earth and one on the sea, was immovable. So, dearest daughters, try to cultivate a love of crosses and humiliations. By their means God wants us to earn a priceless reward.

*Anyone who loves will suffer.*

6. Adversity is the best of teachers and one learns the interior life much better in poverty than in prosperity. Suffering endured in the right way gives us energy, but we must accept trials and contradictions as marks of God's love and mercy. I can assure you that, if you refuse a small cross, you will find a heavier one! Characters that are at first weak and indecisive grow strong by self-abasement, poverty and contradictions. What is more, if they overcome these trials, they will be fit to do God's work and will understand other people's troubles better, having already experienced them. When you are corrected or when some difficulty confronts you, often you do not think that God is correcting you in his mercy because he loves you. So be convinced that those in charge of you are always the agents of Providence; everything they ask of you is for the good of your soul and in your interest. They know you risk your spiritual health in doing your own will and to avoid that they show you God's will. Anyone who loves will suffer. The more you give to God, the more he will ask, but in return the more you conquer yourself the more he will make it up to you. So we must be ready to make the sacrifices he wants of us.

*Wait, be silent, pray, suffer and hope.*

7. In the early days of the Company of Jesus, St. Ignatius had only ten religious with him in Rome. He planned to send four of them away on an important mission, but God said to him: "I want all of them." "But what shall I do?" queried Ignatius. "You will stay alone with mein Rome." Don't be surprised at crosses. Bossuet says: "When the Lord wants to crucify a soul, He always achieves it." Another writer says: "Happy the communities who experience troubles!" I have noticed that there is always a house on Calvary somewhere in the Institute, but just as great calm comes in the wake of a hurricane, so great graces follow the cross. We must learn to carry the cross, yes, but that does not prevent our feeling the suffering. Even St. Paul exclaimed that life had become bitter to him on account of his many crosses. Indeed is there anyone without vexations and various troubles? How many people in the world are contradicted from morning to night and silently resign themselves to their lot, while certain Religious are forever complaining.

In the Imitation there is a passage which I often read: "If you keep silent when you suffer, you will draw down God's blessing on you." Here we find the wonderful secret of the lovers of the cross, on which we must not only meditate, but put into practice. Let us accept the sufferings God sends us in wholehearted submission, without questioning or complaining, or yielding to discouragement!

*Learn to suffer and be silent.*

8. I cannot emphasize it too much, our apostolates cannot begin, or grow strong, or come to fruition except at the foot of the Cross. Jesus wills that we follow Him to Calvary: it is there that He allows us to share in the redemption of souls which he achieved by the outpouring of his blood. If, in the work assigned to you by obedience, you meet with trials, if the difficult characters of our girls try you to the limit, bear it all patiently and silently, and never by your own fault, lose the merits God has made it possible for you to gain.

## CHAPTER 57

### TO THE NOVITIATE

*I will follow you wherever you go. (Luke 9:57)*

1. I think of the Novitiate as the nursery of the Order and I can't help telling you, dear daughters, that you will be either the support and glory of our Congregation or you will be its heart-break. But, no, you must be its glory by being faithful to your vocation.

Our dear Lord has always given us special proofs of his love. From the very beginning He has sent us subjects according to His Heart, religious full of zeal and enthusiasm. What a fervent Novitiate it has been, a great school of holiness!

The first Novices are now apostles of the Institute, they have been specially called to important works and there will always be others driven by the same saintly zeal. So work now in order to be one of those privileged souls, later on. God has called you just as He called the first Novices and if you are faithful to Him you too will be blessed as they are.

*Never give up!*

2. I seem to see you all, going up and down the mystical ladder, striving to reach holiness. Never give up! Just remember that you are not alone, but that Jesus is working with you and gives you strength. If only you could really understand the beauty and value of your vocation, you would count yourselves blessed and divinely favoured.

One day, our Lord said to His Apostles: "I will make you fishers of men." What had these men to offer? They were uneducated. They fished for a living and God made them fishers of souls! Well, dear daughters, perhaps the Lord will choose those of you who seem the least capable and will destine them to catch a great number of souls. What has happened until now is proof of what I am saying. I have seen sisters who were very simple, with no special talents and not apparently able to accomplish much, who have performed prodigies; God wished to exalt their humility and their burning love for souls. On the other hand, a novice, even if endowed with fine qualities of mind, but lacking a spirit of sacrifice will become incapable of doing good and will be more of a burden than a help. When excessive self-love controls a person, what harm it does!

*Humility is Truth and truth is Reality. (Leahy)*

3. There are certain types who always imagine they are not being fairly treated, who want people to be constantly pandering to them. Such Novices will never become Religious according to the heart of God. Even supposing they had received a first class education and knew several languages, one could not use them. Love learning, yes; acquire knowledge, if you like. Perhaps in this way you will be of greater service to the Congregation. Above all, however, you must love obedience and humility, and be zealous in living the Rule. Often read the Constitutions and practise them. This is your principal study. Without it you will destroy your defences and be devoured by the demon of boredom, aversion and pride and so will be in danger of losing your souls.

*Everything interior and exterior,  
must breathe humility.*

4. Do you know, dear children, what is the principal cause of the loss of vocations? It is pride. That is an evil spirit that upsets and destroys Communities. It attacks the rich and the poor. It seems to me that the demon of pride carries an axe in one hand and a sword in the other. With one it wrecks our best actions and reaches into our inmost heart with the other. I would much rather see you all bitten to death by snakes than be possessed by the spirit of pride! I do not mean that pride is reigning in your souls, but that we must not fail to change even our outward behaviour. Everything in our bearing that does not breathe humility must go; our Lord has recommended this exquisite virtue so much. How I love these most beautiful of Our Lord's sayings: "Learn of me for I am gentle and humble of heart." (Matt. 11:29) "Let he who is first become the last and servant of all." (Mk. 10:44) "Let the

greatest among you become the least." (Luke 9:48) I would be fearful for a Sister who thought that any of our foundations could not exist without her!

*Jesus drove out many demons. (Mk. 1:32)*

5. Besides the demon of pride, there are the demons of greed; these make us take a dislike to the food which is served, and take a fancy for something else. There are, too, demons of jealousy who sow discord over trifles; and those of impatience, bad temper, pretence, fickleness, indiscretion and so on. When these infernal spirits fail to introduce a state of tepidity and laxness in a monastery they take counsel together and say: "Let's see to it that some Religious full of pride enter this house; people who are touchy, disgruntled about everything and who become upset over the tiniest prick to their self-love. In this way we shall succeed in putting an end to peace and so ultimately triumph."

You know the story about the wicked spirit who flattered himself for having, in the end, made a Religious, whom he had tempted for thirty years, commit a sin. By what ruse did he bring about this poor soul's fall? By instilling into him a sentiment of pride. The demon of tepidity is also one we should beware of. To tell you the truth, one doesn't know what to do with certain indolent people who are always tired. If you have someone like that, according to one writer, wherever you send her, whatever work you give her, she will always be discontented.

*To serve Our Lord one must be ready to fight Satan.*

6. Our vocation is not for lazy people who are afraid of work and, fearing fatigue, are capable of abandoning God's work. We need valiant souls like St. Teresa full of fervour and courage. The devils, understanding all the good she was capable of and unable to assail her virtue, persecuted her in a thousand ways. One day they demolished the walls of a convent she was having built and caused her nephew's death under the rubble. By a miracle she revived him. Several times they threw her to the ground hoping to kill her. Sometimes they caused the novices to yawn and sleep in choir, but the fervour of these Carmelites was disconcerting. One day, the Lord said to St. Teresa: "After heaven and the Blessed Sacrament, I take my delight in the hearts of your daughters."

One day Mother Anne of St. Bartholmew, one of St. Teresa's first helpers, saw a crowd of infernal spirits in her cell doing all they could to terrify her. They were furious because she was founding Carmels in France. But she would not give in, remembering that to serve our Lord, one must be ready to fight Satan. With resolute courage she sent them packing! It was remarkable how the evil spirits fled from a new house when the Chapel with the Blessed Sacrament was opened.

*A dislike of our Religious Exercises  
is a sign of spiritual decline.*

7. Oh! how I hope you will all be like these great souls, who long only to extend God's reign and to go forward ever doing good without letting anything stop them! St. Bernard tells us that this desire is the clearest sign of God's presence in a soul. When it is missing there is reason to fear that tepidity and a lack of interest will take over and lead to boredom in our Religious exercises. Then, just as an aversion to food is the symptom of illness, so a dislike of our religious exercises is the same indication of spiritual decline.

When one doesn't value passing graces enough, they go, never to return. In the Institute one generation will succeed another. In thirty years, for example, shall I still be here? Will any of our first Religious be alive? You see, then, how essential it is to form zealous novices who will have the honour of the Congregation at heart and will one day support our Houses. In a word the first fervour should never wane. May the holiness of your lives, totally consecrated to the good of souls, draw down heaven's blessings and favour on the Institute.

## CHAPTER 58

### TO THE NOVITIATE

*I have chosen you. (Jn. 15:16)*

1. You know, my dear daughters, that God himself chooses the persons who undertake the Religious Life, but woe to those who refuse to correspond to this grace! In depriving themselves of the special protection of God by infidelity, they put their souls in grave danger. This is why I feel bound to implore you to make every effort to be faithful to what you are told; in this way you will keep the spirit of your vocation intact.

At our Judgement we shall have to account for the inspirations, instructions and good example we have received, so you should often think of this coming day; and the fear you may feel will be a powerful incentive to make the most of the help given you by those responsible for guiding you to holiness, and of the concern they have for your spiritual advancement.

*Carry our Constitutions in your heart  
and they will carry you.*

2. I want you all to, be saints, because you are on mount Zion. If a fire should break out and burn down the house with the Constitutions and Directories, you should prove to be so many living Rules. Study our holy observances over and over again, because the human heart is weak and you could forget our laws. Those who have not taken lovingly to heart our holy Rules will soon be shaken. David said: "I meditate on your law day and night!" In it he found comfort and strength and so should we. Thoroughly penetrate your Rule. It is a gold mine where you will find thoughts able to keep you steady in your duties and, above all in the love of your fourth vow.

Carry your Constitutions in your heart and mind and on your arms, and they will carry you. Begin the day in a holy fashion and follow all the exercises with regularity. Be nourished by the Constitutions as babies are nourished by milk. They are the star guiding you to heaven, the pillar of fire to give you light in deepest darkness. Don't adjust the Constitutions, to your mood and caprices but adjust your moods and fancies to the Constitutions. Order, peace and the happiness of the citizens reign in a country, when those in authority carefully see that the laws are kept. In the same way our fidelity to the Rules and Constitutions will uphold and strengthen us. Let us not depart from them and we shall always live in peace.

It is essential, dear children, that you take the firm resolution not to seek counsel except from those who have received from God the mission to direct you. He has given them graces and lights to solve your doubts or lessen the troubles which may be worrying your minds.

*It is only by prayer that one becomes  
fit for the Apostolate.*

3. Don't be downcast by your weaknesses; if you fall get up again with courage. Remember that to reach the top of Mount Carmel and taste the interior peace experienced by faithful religious, one must first pass through bitter waters. Mount Carmel is the symbol of delights, because, long ago it was very fertile, rich in vines and olives and all kinds of flowers and fruits. To reach its summit is very tiring and often one becomes discouraged. I once saw a painting representing Mount Carmel with three people endeavouring to climb it. One of the three was already near the top, another was still low down chained to a rock, the third was already halfway up, but her foot was held by a thread which hindered her progress. The one bound to the rock represented souls held by the chains of bad habits with no hope of going high, unless God were pleased to break their bonds by a miracle. The one held by a thread symbolised souls who did, indeed, wish to serve God, but they were, as it were, caught by some small, ill-regulated affection for earthly things. They struggle to go up but this thread prevents them, because even small imperfections are obstacles on the road to holiness.

*Trees which are pruned are the finest.*

4. What a dreadful thing it would be, dear daughters, if you should ever unsettle one of your companion's vocation by an imprudent word or bad example! Think of the account you would have to render before God! So try to give good example to each other.

Don't be afraid of small trials. Trees which have been pruned are the finest. Be strong in soul, and generous of heart and transcend your self-love. If the opportunity occurs, don't hesitate to practice even an heroic act of virtue. If one washed by merely wetting her fingertips, or barely touching herself with a sponge, how could one ever be clean? When learning to swim, you have to throw yourself in entirely, not lower yourself in little by little.

Some saints forced themselves to look after the sick, suck terrible sores, and finally they could do with pleasure things which had filled them with horror. Others conquered temptations and found peace of -soul by rolling on thorns. Mother de Chantal who had long experienced dangerous temptations against the faith did really extraordinary things. One day she burned the names of Jesus and Mary on her heart with a red hot iron. All this shows us that there is no temptation we cannot overcome with a firm will and God's grace. Let me add, however, never to do such mortifications without permission.

*The happiness of being a Religious can only be felt at the cost of some sacrifice.*

5. Never lose courage and don't imagine that you will save your souls more easily in the world; be convinced, rather, that in its hubbub and confusion you would meet much graver danger and would be very unhappy. Don't be like the Novice described in the Fathers of the Desert. Weary of spiritual aridity and troubles he decided to go back to the world. God willed to correct him in a really unusual way. He allowed the Demon to appear to him armed with an iron bar. With this he gave him three heavy blows on his back saying: "There! That's how I treat those in my service!"

The happiness of being a Religious can only be felt at the cost of some sacrifice. For a long time a young Novice underwent a kind of martyrdom because she couldn't get used to the silence. Another Religious of a very austere order, felt such an unconquerable repugnance to sweeping that every time she began she let the broom fall several times. Each time, she picked it up saying: "Lord help me! I would rather die than not do your will." For many years she had no spiritual consolations, and while she thought she had no love of her vocation, she made it seem so attractive to people she had to deal with, that she inspired them with a love of it.

*Be mature, firm and generous.*

6. Expect to be tried. It could be said that those who have never been tempted know nothing about the spiritual life. St. Gregory tells us that there is a morning devil, a midday devil and an evening devil. By that he means that we are tempted at the beginning, the middle and the end of our lives. So he tempts Novices ruthlessly but subtly, thinking that if he succeeds all is gained by turning a soul from her vocation at the very outset of her religious life. He tempts the old in Religion afraid lest his prey escapes him. With religious who are only halfway through their lives he is less implacable, thinking he has time enough, and counting on human inconstancy. So put up a good fight and don't be one of those spineless souls who become the devil's plaything. One day a Saint was shown the Spirit of Darkness amusing himself with a number of souls as children do with snowballs. They were alarmed by a mere straw, controlled by their imaginations, carried away by every gust of sadness or joy, busy only with themselves, with never a thought of God's glory. Don't be like them, dear daughters, but be mature, firm in your commitments, generous and unshaken in the face of the evil one. So you will become capable of the great works your zeal makes you long for. Meanwhile, become strong. I must admit I would rather preserve and uphold the vocation of one among you, than to undertake the conversion of fifty or even a hundred penitents. The reason? Because we should always aim at the most perfect thing. All this is why I am so anxious to forearm you against anything which may in future shake you. You know that, when an archer bends his bow, he aims above the desired mark, otherwise the arrow will fall short. Do the same, aim higher so that you will reach at



least the minimum required. For lack of this practice many Religious are less perfect after ten years of profession than they were when they pronounced their Vows.

*Be ready for trials wherever you are.*

7. Dear Novices, we pin our hopes on you; we count on you to bring help to our foundations. Our Sisters there are overcome by overwork. Oh! how we are longing for you to be ready to go to their aid! But be ready for crosses wherever you go. What seems the most desirable place is sometimes the one with most hidden thorns. Our Sisters in the foundations could tell you how often they encounter hidden bitterness. And so I wish you all interior crosses, dear children, to accustom you to future difficulties. They are an excellent means of strengthening you. And so you may merit the many graces you will need in the days of struggle and toil awaiting you, I repeatedly urge you to be faithful to the Rule and Holy Observances.

## CHAPTER 59

### ON THE APOSTOLATE

*Here is my servant.... a bruised reed lie will not break,  
a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. (Is. 42:3)*

1. Much will be asked of those who have received much. I keep coming back to my key topic, our holy vocation which we must love deeply, and our fourth vow - our glory and our protection. Because of it all our actions acquire priceless merit, and you must make a habit of referring to it everything good that you do, as to the supreme objective. This vow implies great purity, for people should see the highest virtues shining in us, for each of us has been called to be a light to souls. You must be both guides and mothers to our penitents. They should find in you comfort in their troubles and a cure for their ills. The more our penitents are spiritually sick, the more interest we should take in them; and the more they tend to fall, the more compassion must we have for them.

So let us try to support the broken reed and keep alight the wavering flame. If we are harsh towards these souls, whom God has already touched with his grace, we must fear that he will leave us to our own resources as a punishment for our rashness and pride. The words of St. Augustine are worth thinking about: "There is no sin, however great, which others commit, that we are not capable of, if God did not sustain us by his grace." The seed of all sins is in us. If the compassionate eyes of the Lord were not ever upon us the storm of our bad inclinations would blind us and we should fall victim to them. How truly the Apostle Paul said: "I chastise my body and bring it under control, for fear that, having preached to others, I myself might be condemned." (I Cor. 9:27)

*I set before you life and death;  
now choose life .... that you may  
love the Lord your God. (Dent. 30:19)*

2. St. Mary Magdalen sinned much. One could, however, believe, that in the eyes of God, she was less to blame than many indifferent Christians today, because she had not yet been enlightened by the Gospel truths. What an account we shall have to give for the many great graces we have received! In the same way more will be asked of our children, who have had the happiness of being baptised in infancy, who were instructed in the Faith and received the Sacraments and who then rebelled against God, than of those who never received those helps. The first are much more culpable than Mary Magdalen. What zeal we shall need to obtain their conversion!

We must never think or say that having sinned, our girls should be ready to suffer without complaining. Oh, my dear daughters, that is not what our Lord teaches us by his way of treating sinners. Once we had among the penitents, a young person who filled me with a compassion I could not describe. Always silent, always bathed in tears, she could find no consolation, haunted by the thought of having offended God. I used to say to her; "Your must trust in the boundless mercy of God." "Oh, Mother". she replied, "I feel I shall die like this and only then will my grief at having offended my Saviour cease." In fact, she did not live long, and left her companions the memory and example of a sincere conversion and perfect contrition.

*Be polite and well-bred*

3. One snag which young and inexperienced religious come up against is in thinking that one can convert people by much preaching. No, that is not a good method. They are bored by it, that's all! To win their heart, soften their characters, and correct their faults one must first gain their goodwill, caring for them, showing them respect. Most of them on arrival have no upbringing, and like to flaunt their bad behaviour. Well, you will never win them for God except by treating them with exquisite thoughtfulness. In correcting them, never use unsuitable expressions, you will only annoy them. Yes, be polite and well bred, as our Lord's spouses should be. It is one of the best ways of changing them.

*We must not be signposts  
pointing the way forward to others,  
but staying still ourselves. (A. Morton)*

4. "Learn to be silent before you speak; learn to keep the law before pointing it out." This applies especially to those who have to lead others. They should nourish themselves by prayer, simplicity, humility and the spirit of our Constitutions, so as to be capable of giving spiritual nourishment to those depending on them. Dearest daughters, appreciate the grandeur of your task! It is essential that the Directresses should be better than their charges, so they must strive for holiness without ever giving up. Often say with David: "Lord, help me lest I faint on the road." One day, I was taking a new penitent to the group; going through the garden we met one of our old Sisters. The young girl said to me: "Mother, that was not a Religious we passed just now, it was an angel." She was so struck by the modesty and gentle bearing of this dear Sister, that the impression played a definite part in her conversion, which was sincere and lasting.

*Grant me a willing spirit to sustain me,  
then I will teach transgressors your way  
and sinners will turn back to you. (Ps. 50:12. 13)*

5. Sometimes you find it trying to remain with the girls who are often difficult to control, but never forget that saving souls is a hard, self-sacrificing work. Souls can only be saved at a price. Normally one reaps the fruit of our labours after much trouble and patience. Each one of our Monasteries already counts many conversions among the penitents; and several of these have died in the most consoling dispositions. How heartening this is for all of us! We heard lately that, in one of our houses, ten penitents were received on the same day! Think how many sins are being prevented by our Sisters! Yes, you must go in search of souls everywhere on earth.

How right our venerable Father was in urging us to implore the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary for the light we need in dealing with our girls. And in our Book of customs it says: "They must often ask the Heart of Jesus, source of holiness, for prudence and gentleness, remembering that these souls according to St. Peter are not redeemed by gold and silver, but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ." And our Constitutions tell us that to convert a soul is a greater work than to create a world. You see, material things do not rebel against the word of God, while human beings do so only too frequently. Our poor girls are most often tempted against Faith and Hope. Never tire of strengthening the truths of religion in their hearts, and of inspiring them with unshakeable hope in the Divine Mercy. If sometimes when they are near to death they tell you they cannot hope to be saved, having contributed to the loss of other souls, buoy them up and rouse their confidence, by pointing out the proofs we have of God's endless goodness towards sinners.

*Rise above difficulties and go straight on.*

6. You have heard how St. Ignatius Loyola tried to found a Refuge in Rome. Having given time, trouble and weariness to the effort, he was blamed on all sides for having attempted an undertaking which was thought to be quite impossible. The saint then said with perfect calm and resignation: "If I could have prevented just one grave sin, I would be happy. We must imitate the Angels. Having used all kinds of means to save men, whether their ministry be successful or not, they never lose their holy peace." According to St. Paul whoever plants is nothing, nor he who waters. Everything comes from God who gives the growth. Unhappily one sees souls relapse after having given good grounds for hope. A word, a touch of jealousy, some vexations, a mere nothing is enough to spoil everything. We have noticed that, generally speaking, there are two kinds of conversions among the penitents. The first is not thorough, for some persons are still as changeable as the weather. For example, you will see that, after spending a winter well with us, at springtime their imaginations are disturbed by the memory of what they have left in the world and they want to leave. One of our Superiors wrote: "The peace of our children this spring is a proof of the benefits they drew from the retreat they had made, but I'm always afraid of some sad decline in their dispositions." The second conversion comes later on, so you must not be downhearted. Rise above difficulties and go straight on. Let us give ourselves entirely to the good of souls, and with such courage that we may be ready to give even our lives for them. In this way, we shall glorify the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, where our names will be written for all eternity.

## CHAPTER 60

### THE APOSTOLATE (CONTINUED)

*The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. (Gal. 5.22)*

1. Beloved daughters, today I must remind you once again of a very important regulation: never strike our children! I know that none of you do so, but it is my duty to exhort you to be faithful to this recommendation. Oh, no, you must never use harsh measures. It is well - known that they do not correct anything, and they would merely make us culpable before God and man. Let this order stand for ever and always, as though it were inscribed and printed everywhere, because, everywhere and in all circumstances, I wish it to be obeyed.

You must grasp this thoroughly; we have no rights over our penitents! We can neither ill- treat them, nor shut them up. Our protégées have all come to us voluntarily, or are placed with us by their parents' authority, and we can no more chastise them than keep them against their will. Besides, harshness is no more the spirit of our vocation than it is the Spirit of God. If a penitent openly rebels, if she threatens you, send her away; we should only have penitents of goodwill, we are not obliged to keep the others.

Take care not to scold too much; be serious but full of kindness, especially to the new arrivals. Whatever be the cause of their tears these are always bitter, and if you are not good and compassionate towards them they could succumb to despair. Make no mistake, often on coming to us, their first feeling is one of dislike for the house, and sometimes for the Directress. But later, if they are well treated, surrounded with kind attentions and signs of interest, they change their outlook and begin to feel attraction towards the Faith. Respect will follow and then affection for the Sisters. As you know some do not want to leave us. It needs much care and great concern to lead souls to God. We have experienced this in all our houses.

*The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness.*

2. There are two things which usually have a bad effect on our girls, martial music and the sound of drums. Unhappily, in the centre of towns, this can often happen. More fortunate are the houses situated in quiet surroundings, a short distance away from noisy towns. There one can enjoy the peace, and the air is purer.

So redouble your vigilance. Be watchful in the Chapel, during work, above all at recreations and in the dormitories. Be sure a night light always burns there. Keep an eye on everything, without it being too noticeable and tiresome. Be like a mother always concerned for her beloved children. Above all be careful that nothing unfortunate nor anything that offends God happens through your lack of vigilance!

Those of you, dear daughters, who are not employed in the groups, must not go to them without permission, nor must you speak to the girls when you are not working with them. Be quite sure that if you are not named for an apostolate, you have not the grace to do good there; and you cannot deal with the children, that is, with the persons in our different establishments, without detriment to yourself; for they will learn that in doing so you are being disobedient. A Religious, however, who does her duty, who avoids being seen about, and does not speak to those she should not speak to, commands respect. If, one day, she should be named Directress, she will be received with esteem and happiness.

*The head cannot say to the feet,  
"I don't need you!" (I Cor. 12:2 1)*

3. There should be a proper separation between the Community and the Sections, for the Sisters should have their privacy.

The second mistresses must act with authority when they are in charge. There is nothing more harmful than those exaggerated differences by which everything is in the hands of the

Directress, as though the second mistress did not count. The Directress must show much confidence in the Sisters who help them, while the latter are full of consideration and deference towards the Directress, leading the children to her. They should never say, for example, in the groups: "If I were your First Mistress I would never do that!" The children are not edified by that kind of talk; it causes them to lose respect and esteem for the Sister and leads them to think she has a scheming character. The second mistresses should be angels of peace, and the Directress should listen to what they say, being happy to use them as intermediaries in various circumstances.

With regard to corrections, those are best left to the First Mistress: she knows what will help each one. Although it is true that she mustn't be touchy with regard to her aides, on the other hand, it wouldn't do to go so far as to leave the running of the groups in their hands.

*The fruit of the Spirit is patience.*

4. A Directress should find her contentment in the midst of her flock; in fact nothing does more good than her constant presence in an establishment. She must remember that she is in charge, not only of all the temporal details, but that she must carefully watch over the spiritual needs of her girls. Of this she will render an account.

If you are not the Directress, never allow any of our dear penitents to confide in you in any way. For your experience, I will admit that, while I was second, I committed an imprudence which I bitterly regretted. A penitent came to me and said: "Mother, I haven't the courage to speak to our First Mistress about something which troubles me. Would you be so kind as to listen for a moment, so that you can advise me?" I agreed out of compassion and said what I thought was suitable. But there you are! She had deceived me.

The penitents will find endless pretexts to have secret things to say to a Sister, especially if they see that the Sister enjoys these confidences. Some of them are capable even of inventing sins that they have never committed, on the pretext of seeking light and advice. Tell them that they should ask advice of the confessor to whom they should open their minds fully if they want comfort. You know what our Holy Constitutions enjoin. Keep faithfully to them.

*Love is not proud.*

5. What should the Sisters do when they are placed in charge of a class. First, they place their task in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and make a resolution to turn to them frequently. Then they must ask the Superior for her advice, and learn what her intentions are. In the groups should they immediately begin by giving fine instructions? No, it is not the moment for that. They must begin by being very good to their children, they must take care of the sick and they must insist on orderliness and cleanliness. Dearest daughters, those of you who work with the penitents, the Magdalens and the children of the different groups beware of being familiar with them: never speak about your health. Be convinced that as soon as you lose your reserve, you will lose the dignity you need as Mistress.

It would certainly be improper for a Sister to speak about herself, her family and what she was before she entered. It would be even more unseemly if a Mistress should let her charges know about the sufferings and difficulties she might have. In this would be not only pettiness, but the danger of losing the respect that all persons consecrated to God must inspire by their dignified bearing.

*Serve in love. (Gal. 4:13)*

6. The duty strictly necessary above all others is that the Mistress ensures that the Catechism is taught to all in her care so that being thoroughly grounded in the Faith, they continue to be practising Christians when they return to the world. Some of them are not capable of learning the Catechism word for word. If one were to insist that they do so, they will feel humiliated and discouraged. We must be patient and, coming down to their level of intelligence, help them to understand and grasp things as best they can.

One important recommendation with regard to our orphans, preservation children and others, is to give them regularly lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic and so on. If they are well taught and

know how to work well, they will be able not only to earn their own living but also to help their parents. Rouse in them. great respect and devotedness towards their parents and families.

When you notice that a correction will make a child fly into a temper, speak in a general way about such and such a fault, or speak openly to another capable of receiving it quietly.

*The fruit of the Spirit is goodness.*

7. Keep their belongings and their clothes in good order. Our young girls take offence when this is not done, although sometimes they are themselves disorder personified. In our houses everything must be in perfect order. See that your children are always clean, and their clothes carefully mended. At a first glance one can tell whether there is order or not in our groups.

My dear daughters, you are bound to be mothers to your penitents; you owe them the care that a mother has for her children and, here, all of you are mothers. Cooks and bakers work for them and prepare their food, and should do so with great attention. Let me remind you once again never to give your children cold, badly prepared meals. Use your judgement and don't make one portion of bread do for three people. If a child doesn't fancy her portion, don't serve her a plateful of reproaches! Take as your guide what you have seen at the Mother House, and don't deviate from it. If you find yourself with someone who wants to do otherwise, remind her what she saw and heard here. Be like those farmers in the Vendée, who never stop telling their sons and grandsons: "My father used to dig here ...or there."

*If you work for souls,  
pray to the Holy Angels. (S.M.E.)*

8. I want you to keep well in mind, also, that the children must never work on Sundays, making little things on the pretext that they are pious objects of various kinds. Never consent to that .

Never put a preservation child, a penitent or a Magdalen in charge of the infirmaries. They can help, yes, but a Sister must always be the Infirmarian and keep control. If you leave them to themselves, you may be the cause of grave disorders. One of them could make a mistake, such as giving the wrong medicine through thoughtlessness, which could even cause the death of a penitent.

As you can see, it is vital that the Mistresses are vigilant, that the infirmarians are even more so, and that the pharmacists take good care to explain how medication should be given.

One last recommendation. Don't habitually sit up late, don't stay up all night under the pretext of urgent work. A directress, who is faithful to all these recommendations, trying to put all we have said into practice, can be sure of having carried out her mission. and indeed she can claim my deepest affection.

## CHAPTER 61

### THE APOSTOLATE (CONTINUED)

*It is only by self-forgetfulness  
that one can succeed in the  
apostolate. (S.M.E.)*

1. My dear daughters, be aware that what would convert one person, could do just the contrary to another. It takes great tact and discernment to say things at the right time and in the right way. For example, it would not be appropriate to speak to our girls about penance the day they were served a dinner which did not go down well! Rather you should say: "Poor dears! I am so sorry you had such a dinner today. I really feel bad about it!" You will see that they will say: "O Mother, don't worry, we are alright!" Some other day, one could speak at instructions of the evil of sin, of the sufferings of Purgatory, and how good it is to be able to avoid it by practising some self-denial in this world.

One day I noticed that a certain number of the girls were in a very bad humour. They whispered together, grumbled, and seemed to be plotting something. As soon as I was free, I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament and prayed fervently to the Sacred Heart. After an hour's adoration, when I returned to the group to replace the second Mistress, what was not my surprise when I saw them all burst into tears and surround me, promising that in future their behaviour would give me nothing but consolation! Often I persuaded them to make acts of reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to make little retreats in His honour, during which they kept perfect silence. Sometimes I stayed the whole day with them, without being replaced by another Sister, except for a very brief period.

Remembering that I heard it said in a certain convent school how dangerous it was for the pupils to become bored, I went to great pains to prevent sadness from entering the hearts of our poor girls. When they appear depressed one should have a word with them, get them to sing together and in short, use all sorts of means to cheer them up; this prevents a lot of faults, especially during recreation times.

*You will meet with difficulties everywhere.*

2. I remember one Sunday there were a lot of them in a terrible temper, they wouldn't listen to the Sister with them, but only made fun of her. They were sitting together under a tree as though they were hatching some mischief. I came along and wanted them to come for a walk with me, but they didn't follow as usual. I was really at a loss, and in my heart begged God to inspire me. Then I saw a grass-hopper at my feet, picked it up and showed it to a few of them. "Isn't it charming!" I said. One by one they gathered round to have a look, mocking: Oh, how lovely: well worth coming to see indeed!" Pretending not to hear, I asked what we should call the little creature. "We must rear it and we shall build a little house for it and so on.

I continued to joke about it and they began to be amused and in a better mood. In a few moments the situation was normal. They went looking for a cage and our poor little grass-hopper helped us to spend several pleasant recreations.

You see how difficult it is to manage a group, but I beg you for the love of God never say anything to your children which could wound them; that would be doing the devil's work. You would discourage these already - wavering souls, and you would not be daughters of the Good Shepherd who takes the lost sheep on his shoulders, and is all tenderness toward it.

*Use all Your ingenuity to win hearts for good.*

3. Be absolutely fair in your dealings. Forgive without any hint of resentment. Avoid wounding feelings, which is very hard to forgive. Use all your ingenuity, dear daughters, to win hearts for good. Remember this thought, expressed by several authors, which has always struck me: Our Lord is called by the Prophet Isaiah, Rod and Flower; a rod is used for correction, a flower for refreshment. But he never calls him a sword, because a sword wounds and kills. We are told in St. Francis Xavier's life that he ate and drank with the Indians according to their customs. The Jesuit Fathers treasure the parasol he used in Japan. I saw this parasol in Rome; it is made of artistically woven palm fronds. I

assure you that I considered this object, which had contributed to God's glory and the salvation of souls, more precious than any instrument of severe penance.

*Let us not become weary of doing good. (Gal. 6:9)*

4. My dear daughters, to win souls for God you must be kindly and pleasant, and work at becoming so. May peace shine from your countenance; gentle and kindly words fall from your lips to bring balm to the souls of your listeners. Your manners, far from being stilted and haughty, should be easy, pleasant, obliging and at the same time serious. Let everything about you, in fact, show that you are consecrated to God and happy in your vocation. Forethought and prudence are other qualities you must acquire. Mistresses who are forgetful are a burden to their helpers and to the girls; get to know their needs and provide for them. Before speaking of spiritual matters, see to it that they are contented and don't imagine that, to allow them to suffer, will hasten their conversion. Treat them with nobility of soul.

*Jesus went about doing good. (Acts 10:38)*

5. Have compassion for these dear girls. They must do great violence to themselves; with many passions to overcome, can you imagine that it is easy for them to obey, to keep silence and to work all day!

Beware that none of them becomes ill without the Directress knowing, and then don't make them work as though they were well. See to it, as far as you can, that the penitents have no reason to complain. Poor children! They go to the refectory where they find but a frugal portion: that rouses in them a thousand memories; in the world they would have had all they fancied, they could go out as it suited them, and the more they want to change, the more they are tempted.

From time to time have something good and pleasant to tell them, to banish sadness and cheer them up. A Mistress who stays all day in her place without saying a word, will scarcely find hearts ready to listen to her when she wishes to give an instruction. It would be worse if the recreations were still more dismal, more gloomy even than the times of silence. We must divert them by harmless amusements. I would like you to have a fund of interesting anecdotes to entertain them with: you wouldn't believe how much that interests them and drives away the boredom, battles, and temptations that plague them. Be convinced, my dear daughters, that it needs a lot of tact to find ways to entertain them and distract them at the right time and in the right way. You will need more skill to provide them with happy recreations than to give them fine instructions. I recall that, if on Sundays we could not have sung Mass, everything was over by eight o'clock. What torture for me! On Saturday I would be racking my brains for some way of spending the next day happily with our dear children.



## CHAPTER 62

### OUR GOOD FORTUNE TO WORK FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS

*Why did you leave your family  
and your worldly prospects  
if not for souls?*

1. How moved I was, my dear daughters, by the comforting words addressed to you on the last day of your retreat: "A religious who has had the happiness of converting a soul will be practically sure of saving her own." Should she become tepid or assailed by the most frightful temptations, the soul she will have led back to God will speak up for her and say, "Lord she showed mercy to me, so show mercy to her!"

This thought will encourage and reassure you when you have to reproach yourselves for many faults. When you are about to appear before God's tribunal the souls who owe their salvation to you will plead your cause: "A soul for a soul, Lord; this Mother helped to save mine, without her I would be lost! It is she who converted me by your grace, so have pity on her, as she had pity on me."

I often think of that article of the Rule which begins: "Understand why you are assembled and united in Community..." and I say to myself that this applies best to the salvation of souls. Why, in fact, have you left your country, your family and all your worldly possessions if not for souls? And would it not be disastrous if, now, you were to lose sight of your objective?

We should consider ourselves much happier in our vocation than many other Religious, who cannot do in theirs all the good they would like. When we close the eyes of our penitents in death, we have the consolation of being able to suggest, right up to the end, thoughts which will prepare them to meet God, while some other Religious, employed in hospitals, are forbidden to help the dying in their last moments.

*Streams of graces and love surround our labours.*

2. My dearest daughters, let us value more and more the grace of our vocation, and joyfully and gratefully look forward to all the good Heaven has for us to do. One could well say that our ministry is the continuation of that of the Apostles. For your comfort listen to Jesus speaking to his disciples: "You, who have followed me, will sit on shining thrones in heaven." (*Matt. 19:28*) This is addressed to all who have imitated the Apostles in their missionary work.

We can also say that, wherever we are, God pours on us streams of graces and love, by the blessings with which he surrounds our labours; until we enjoy in heaven such torrents of delight as satiate the just soul.

So, while we are in this world, let us accept our crosses peacefully, we shall always have them. In this sinful world there is always something to suffer, and suffer we always shall! To pray for the salvation of souls is the duty of all of you. Lately a priest said to me: "You must found other works, you must pray for these works: if you live for any other reason, you are not true to your vocation." It would be shameful in our Institute to allow souls to perish, for you are all servants of the Blessed Virgin and she has chosen you precisely to care for them. She has done us a signal favour to entrust these treasures to us. So we must be faithful to this trust, otherwise this terrible word will be realised: "He who breaks his mother's heart will be cursed." (*Dent. 27:16*) God's glory suffers when we fail him in one of our works, and sometimes the sin of one Sister can bring trouble to others.

*We are all going the same way but  
will all carry away a prize?*

3. All of you in the Institute work for the good of souls, or, at least, you are called to do so. The Sisters who work in the garden, in the bakery, in the linen room or who are busy about other things, never mind where, are all working to save souls. They are practising their fourth vow just as surely as

Superiors and first Mistresses. The Superior has not made a different vow from you and will be judged just like you. Any difference there may be will arise from the Superior's obligations. These are more serious because of the weightiness of her charge, for which she will have to render an account.

Those who pray and those who offer God their work, which everyone employed in the hardest work in the house can do, and even the sick on their bed of suffering, often work more powerfully to save souls than those in the classes. It may well be that the Sister who does the humblest work, who is the least noticed, is the one who, by the fervour of her good desires, wins souls for God, while others who seem to be more useful will perhaps have contributed less.

We are all going the same way but I tremble at St. Paul's words: "All run in the same race, but all do not carry away the prize." (I Cor. 9.-24) There will always be fainthearted people, who will end up seeing their crown taken from them. We are children of Mother Church and must live wholeheartedly as such.

*To convert souls, a life of prayer  
is worth thousands of pious speeches.*

4. Believe me, dear daughters, you are in no more danger in the midst of your penitents than a Carmelite in her cell. Do not let pride rule you, but neither must you give way to discouragement. Be obedient and God will give you the grace you need to carry out the duties entrusted to you. Once again I say, with your Rules and Constitutions, you are capable of anything! Enlarge your souls! The mistresses should be like the pelican which nourishes its young with its own blood. Don't be content with thinking only of yourselves, don't say that it is enough to concentrate on your own perfection, for you know very well that to save souls is an essential part of your obligations.

You often ask me what tactics I used to manage the penitents when I was their mistress. Well, it was with justice and kindness. To lead them more easily to God, one must, generally speaking, speak little and punish little. To change them, a life of prayer is worth thousands of fine words, for holiness speaks to their hearts better than pious speeches; and we want, above all, to inspire them with a desire to know God. Train yourselves never to raise your voice. Sometimes their contrariness leads them to provoke us in order to be punished. That is the moment to look as though we haven't noticed anything. And beware of correcting a whole class for the misbehaviour of just a few, that could have serious consequences. Those poor children who have worked all day and done their best, should not be treated as the ones at fault.

*Be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. (Matt. 10:16)*

5. Mistresses should observe exactly all the regulations and ensure they are punctually observed. Let each duty be done at the appropriate time and not later. When there is doubt on any point, the Mistress will say: "We shall speak to our Mother about it." The children will be impressed by this, and so be led to submission. How unfortunate if they notice that a Sister dislikes obedience, that she is critical, that she does her work grudgingly, that she is partial! Should she correct them they would certainly think: "Physician, heal thyself!" It is a grave risk to speak to them about their past misdeeds. The penitents would be scandalised if you mention certain things, even in passing, being convinced that Religious would never think of such things. We must win them by manners quite contrary to their own, and treat the less polite with great refinement and gentleness sparing them any reason to become irritable or discouraged.

*Amazing grace!*

6. I saw one girl whose face was quite disfigured by all the tears she had shed. If one spoke a word of comfort to her, she was astonished and replied: "How can anyone think of a wretched sinner!" In her last illness she bore her sufferings with wonderful patience. She would exclaim: "O my God, will you really forgive me?" She experienced great anguish during the last days of her life. She seemed to see the Devil holding open a big book, in which all her sins were inscribed with frightful accuracy. A few hours before she breathed her last, as she seemed calmer, the Mistress asked her if she no longer felt her former disquiet. "Oh, no mother," she replied, "I am dying in peace. I have hidden

myself in our Lord's wounds, and I am relying on the riches of his infinite mercy from which I hope for everything."

A Magdalen at Tours who was dying, seeing me come into the infirmary, exclaimed: "O Mother, my best friend! How good you have been to me, I owe you my conversion! It is so comforting to see you! I think Jesus himself has sent you to give me strength." In her very great suffering, she reproached herself for seeking the least relief. She thought herself unworthy of everything, and blamed herself for her lack of courage. Already I was longing to found many houses of the Order, so I said to her: "Dear child, you will probably die very soon. If you have the joy of going straight to heaven, as I hope you will, promise me to ask God to let me know if my idea, of founding many houses for souls wishing to leave the ways of sin, is a thought inspired by him." But how can you doubt it! Oh, yes, Mother, leave it to me, I'll look after it all for you with the Lord." Shortly after her death we were called to found this house of Angers.

We had a penitent who was against God from the day of her First Communion, which she made in bad dispositions. This unhappy child committed as many mortal sins as she possibly could, went to Communion nearly every day having eaten, which she did in the Church to show more contempt. When she saw lambs, she threw stones at them in a rage, because they symbolised the Lamb of God. When she could, she set fire to fields of corn to spoil God's handiwork. But, at last, shocked at herself and touched by grace, she converted and was filled with such profound sorrow for her sins that she dared not raise her eyes to heaven. For three years she followed the Regulations perfectly. Then she fell ill, prepared carefully for death, and lovingly breathed her last. On the eve of her death she gave me a picture, saying with a smile that it was of St. Euphrasia, building Churches. Sometimes the penitents are very fervent. I've seen one of them rapt in prayer for two or three hours at a time. Another seemed to me never to commit any fault knowingly.

Four Magdalens, for fear of being unfaithful to God, prayed for the grace to die. They obtained this grace for they were soon called to Heaven, one after the other in order of profession.

*There is a proper time and procedure for every matter. (Eccl. 8:6)*

7. If it is wrong to correct too often, it is also wrong never to do so. There are occasions when it is necessary to make one's authority felt. Once I was obliged to speak very severely to a penitent who, at first, seemed truly converted: but who afterwards scandalised her companions as much as she had previously edified them. Nothing being able to make her take stock of her conduct, it was a humiliation that pierced her defences and she returned to her duty. But those measures may be used only rarely.

While still a young religious I was put in charge of a very difficult class of penitents. I must admit that for a while I was very strict, above all in abolishing private conversations; so much so that the confessor said to me: "My child, that is enough! Things are going well now, lessen your severity, otherwise your rule will be too harsh." I obeyed. One means I found useful to make them understand they were at fault, was to look at them severely. Several told me they would have preferred any other penance to this look of displeasure. The first days I was in the class, I scarcely spoke at all, everything went on in profound silence although these girls were inclined to frivolity. Sometimes they said to me: "Mother, you must be very tired, go and rest a little and meanwhile we shall be very good." "Dear children," I replied, "I couldn't be any where better than with you. I find it most restful here." And I took good care not to leave them! When I was obliged to refuse their wishes, they used every possible means to make me do what they wanted. One day I found five or six of them gathered round the door of my room. I asked what they wanted, but nobody dared say a word. Finally one of them said they wanted to speak to me together. As I knew what it was all about I said: "How crazy to think that a Sister of Our Lady of Charity would give in to threats! Go away and understand that she would die, if necessary, doing her duty."

*A gentle answer turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15: 1)*

8. Be very prudent, dear daughters, never lay yourselves open to rudeness or to being disobeyed. Understand how essential it is to watch over yourselves so as not to give way to

impatience. If you feel irritated or worked up, refrain from correcting. Fenelon says that, when a person who needs correction, sees that the one who corrects is carried away by passion, then the culprit is scarcely disposed to correct his own passions.

I must repeat this again and again: you will gain much more by a wise flexibility, inspired by true charity, than by too great a rigidity. Remember to keep for yourself what is bitter in any situation and give what is pleasant to others, like the fig tree which keeps the bitter juice and gives us only sweetness in its fruit. Also keep in mind that force gains nothing. A timely cup of sweet milk, given to one of your dear penitents, will do more to bring her to a better frame of mind than any act of severity.

## CHAPTER 63

### CHARITY AND ZEAL

*How God loves our children!*

1. "Take this child and nurse it for me and I will pay you for it." (*Exod. 2:9*) These words of a powerful king's daughter to Moses' mother, may well be said a] so to you, my dear daughters, by a great queen, Holy Church! She entrusts to you these children whom the world does not want, but which her motherly heart eagerly welcomes. What an honour the Church does to you in associating you with the same mission as our Lord.

Now, what happened to Moses, a little child seemingly destined to drown in the Nile? He became the liberator of the people of God. And what will become of this poor penitent who is entrusted to you? It could be that she will become another Magdalen or a Pelagia. What a beautiful mission you have! But how much prayer is necessary to carry it out! For this intention each of us must offer all our sacrifices, sufferings, mortifications and good works, and so each moment of our lives will be devoted to the salvation of these dear souls. The spirit of charity must be your motivation. In saying the office, in singing or working, have in view only to glorify God and do good to souls. How my heart rejoices when I hear you all singing the Sacred Offices, especially on feast days! I am so filled with devotion that I shed tears of joy! I believe that your devotion and fervour help greatly in the conversion of souls. See how God loves these souls. He seems to do miracles just because of them. It is on account of them that we are asked for everywhere; and hear the words: "Take care of these children." We must admit that we owe our vocation to these strayed sheep, because our Congregation would not exist without them, and good done to us is because of what we do for them.

*Only by our eager love can we  
enter the Kingdom of God.*

2. We are always speaking to you about our fourth vow. But can we ever say enough about it and the saving of souls, because that is our vocation and our only aim? Dear Daughters, may you understand more and more the extent of your obligations with regard to our children; that is what I want above everything. Our fourth vow can be summed up in two words: Charity and Zeal. I invite you to ponder on this again and again. It is only by Charity and Zeal that we can enter the Kingdom of God. The Apostles performed prodigies by these two virtues. Listen to St. Paul: "Whoever among you is in trouble, scorned and suffering am I not with him? Is anyone scandalised, and I am not on fire?" That is how you must suffer for your penitents, trusting in God who will always give you His grace as He did to the Apostle. Father Eudes was full of charity and Zeal, he laid the foundations not only of our Congregation but of several other Institutes. M. de Neuville also had Charity and Zeal, and succeeded in founding this house of Angers, cradle of our Institute, from which so many other houses have sprung, harbours of salvation for numerous souls. The Bishops who ask for us, the founders and benefactors of our monasteries, are moved by Charity and Zeal. And what shall I say about our great benefactress Madame d'Andigné who had no other thought than to do good! And what of those other persons who go on giving wonderful proofs of their Charity and Zeal!

*See on each sinner's forehead blood  
from the suffering face of Jesus.*

3. If it happens that you should see one of our poor children covered with the world's dust, not to mention anything more, imitate the holy woman who with her veil wiped the face of her Divine Master. You, too, will see on their foreheads the blood of our Lord, who will have made them clean. Yesterday, I visited our dear penitents. The dear girls, showing how interested they were in our labours, said: "Oh, Mother, how much you must love souls, to work without ceasing for them!" "Now tell me candidly", I replied: "I am sure that you do not really think that our works cause us bitter sufferings nor that they will overwhelm us, but rather that we are happy in what we are doing. For reply, tears flowed down their cheeks and they were choked by emotion."

Oh, my dear daughters, how much charity and compassion we must have for these souls that Holy Church has put into our care, in the name of the Divine Shepherd and of their tender mother, the Blessed Virgin. Love them, yes, love them very much! Comfort them, strengthen these suffering sheep, make them very happy with the grace of God, that is your duty. Never forget that you will only draw hearts to our Lord by love.

*Oh, be generous!*

4. Needless to say, above all, have charity for yourselves, that is, a burning zeal to make progress in the spiritual life, without which you could not have real charity or real zeal for souls, whom you must nourish by the overflow of love in your own heart. Oh, be generous!

What good is there being in the Lord's vineyard without the necessary tools for working there? He would send you away like useless workmen. Set to work! Have pure, prudent, universal and persevering zeal-pure zeal in that it be (or is) inspired by the Holy Spirit, source of purity; universal and persevering zeal, lacking in the caprice of the moment depending on how we feel. We need a daily experience of universal zeal which makes us available to every person and every country. Our zeal must be an enlightened one cautioning us against imprudence. Ask advice when you can't see clearly. For want of prudence sometimes unpardonable blunders are committed.

Zeal does not consist in preaching always and giving good advice, or forever exhorting to virtue; it works rather by good example. Example speaks louder than words and often achieves astounding results.

*Die daily by sacrifice and work.*

5. One could say that our fourth vow constitutes the essence of our vocation. It is this vow which gives you the impetus to take flight for distant shores in search of souls for God. Why do the Novices learn English, Italian and so on, and why do the English and Italians learn French, the mother tongue for all, according to one of our American sisters? It is not merely to extend one's learning, but to use this learning to convert a greater number of souls.

I think we may hope that the Congregation will grow and spread to such a degree, that God will give us the grace that some may have the glory of shedding their blood for souls. Do I mean that we must meet martyrdom half-way? No, it is enough if zeal leads you to wish for nothing but holy obedience and to will only what obedience asks of you. Besides, you must be martyred by a continual martyrdom of sacrifice and work.

Love all your penitents from whatever place they come, devote yourself to their happiness with all possible zeal and you will rejoice the Hearts of Jesus and Mary; you will give joy to the Church, heir to the love of Jesus and Mary for souls. "Take care of these children" she says, "and I will repay you."

## CHAPTER 64

### ON GRATITUDE (BEFORE THE FEAST OF ST. IGNATIUS)

*You admire what you hear about other Orders but  
you don't think about the things which closely  
concern you. I find them as miraculous as  
anything I have read or heard of*

1. The feast of St. Ignatius is not a feast of obligation, nor is it a special feast of Rule, yet we are preparing to celebrate it with great solemnity. Have you guessed the reason, my dear daughters? What are your thoughts on the subject? Without a doubt gratitude fills your hearts, and you are already rejoicing at the thought of keeping the anniversary of the foundation of your dear Mother House. When I see you all united here in this enclosure, and then envisage the whole Congregation, I can't help telling myself that, without the Generalate, most of you would perhaps never have been Religious. Our dear German, English, Italian Sisters and others, where would they have been if the Mother House had never existed? So many of our Sisters, whom we have mourned and who are doubtless enjoying eternal bliss, who knows whether they would have been so high in heaven without the grace of being received here? Couldn't they have stayed in the world and been lost like many others? For, remember, that no one here and in general no Religious, however imperfect she may be, would not have been more so had she stayed in the world.

I tell you, you are the children of miracles.

2. St. Paul said to the early faithful: "You are the children of saints." St. Francis Borgia, third Superior General of the company of Jesus, said the same thing to the sons of St. Ignatius, and I, my dear daughters, I tell you that you are children of miracles. Oh yes, our very existence is a series of miracles. Only God could have maintained us and made us prosper. Isn't it true that you find the house fine, pleasant and large? Nevertheless you do not know what it was like ten years ago. But I, who have seen it begin, grow and widen, I can scarcely believe my eyes! I have every reason to exclaim: "It's a miracle!" We began like a mission among savages! Forgotten by everybody, we languished in extreme poverty, without furniture, without blankets, without clothing, sometimes without food, and what food we had was always insipid and without any dressing. We stayed in that condition for about a year. No Mass except Sundays and Thursdays, and always so late that we could rarely go to Communion. All my life I shall remember that, on the beautiful feast of Corpus Christi, in that year, we were deprived of Holy Communion. Our Bishop seemed to ignore us completely, and other people who would have liked to help us, thought we were rich.

*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. (Ps. 126:5)*

3. After this first period came the era of consolation. We received many postulants. The Sisters vied with each other in giving up their beds. When a postulant experienced our poverty she was happy, in her turn, to share our privations. It was then we received our dear Sisters Mary of St. Sophie (1) and Mary of St. Francis Xavier (2). The latter as soon as she saw me, said: "Oh, Mother, I have been looking for you for ten years; I saw you in a dream and now I recognise you."

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1. Sr. M. of St. Sophie Lavoy, entered June 1831, died June 1852,
  2. Sr. M. of St. Francis Xavier Matthieu, entered August 1831, died Superior at Saumur, December, 1840
  3. Sr. A of St. Bernard David, entered 1831, died 1884.

At that moment our souls embraced, united, and I hope, will love each other for all eternity. Then our dear Sr. Mary of St. Bernard (1) arrived, a worthy Vendean, daughter of martyrs, accompanied by all her family, who gazed at us with admiration. These sisters had, like others, their imperfections; but I can bear witness that their devotedness was without limits. A great number of postulants came. To those who stayed the course we gave the habit; and in a month's time they were able to sustain the Office, sing the litanies, and sometimes even sing for Mass; in a word they could do everything according to the Rule. Although only Novices, they were chanters as well as chorists, while I was always officiant.

#### *Miracles! Miracles!*

4. We had a penitents' class, but they were absolute demons. Among our other afflictions we lacked Mistresses. We asked our Sisters in Nantes for one, and they answered that they were in the same state as we were. What was to be done? It was then that a novice, named Sr. Mary of St. Teresa, who had just received the habit, came to me and offered to take charge of the class. We immediately appointed her, and God so blessed her efforts, that she changed those wolves into lambs. But we did not have her for long. Worn out by hardship, she was soon at death's door. I always regret not having been called on the day she died, in time to hear her last words. "Miracles! miracles!" she kept repeating in a low voice, but by the time I arrived, without having lost consciousness, she could no longer make herself understood. It was she, in fact, who ushered in our era of miracles. Everyday we received postulants, there were usually twenty novices and twenty postulants, and it was at this moment that the thought of a Generalate occurred to several of our Sisters. We put the idea to the Bishop where it was received favourably. On the other hand there was no shortage of opposition and obstacles to this enterprise, but God wanted it and wanted to bring it about himself. So, now we can point to three miracles of divine protection in our foundation: our very existence, the approval of Rome, and the sudden increase in the number of our houses.

#### *Voice your joyful thanks.*

5. I cannot remind you of all the rights Our Lora has to your gratitude. There are so many miraculous happenings that they could go unnoticed. You admire what you hear about other Convents or other Religious Orders, but you don't think about the things which closely concern you. I find them as miraculous as anything I have read or heard of. What is more, the Divine Gardener went to look for you, one by one, in the desert of this world, to lead you himself by the hand into his special flower garden. The dew of heavenly blessings falls on your souls each day to sweeten your labours and sufferings, to fill you with inexpressible peace and to make you as happy as is possible here below. You have a heart made to love, to be grateful! Well then, raise your joyful thanks to your Benefactor for the immense grace of your vocation, love it more and more, wish to have a thousand lives to offer the Lord, and try to give him back love for love.

#### *They shall show great thankfulness to their founders and benefactors. (St. J. Eudes)*

6. My dear daughters, you feel it keenly when you do not meet with gratitude in those from whom you have the right to expect it. And what of God's rights, He who has made you His spouses? Truly, ingratitude is one of those things which hurt us most! So let us think how we wound God's heart when we overlook the gifts received from Him. But after God, our Lady and Holy Church to whom are you indebted? There are several: Our good father de Neuville....

#### **Our good father de Neuville**

To him you owe your happiness, your hopes. In a word, you owe him everything. This venerated name should be written on every door in the house, on every tree in the enclosure. Who could ever tell the whole story of his generosity. This good father gave us shelter and nourishment. Every week he sent us provisions, he paid for our bread, our meat and the rest. And that is not all: we had to have a chapel and it was the Count de Neuville who was the first to speak of the undertaking. On this occasion I realised that he was, indeed, a man of God. We wanted only an ordinary choir for about forty persons as in other houses of the Institute. "Madame", said this good father with an inspired air, "you must know that this is not an ordinary work: it will grow and multiply, and you will have more than two hundred religious here." The next day, he sent us funds for the foundations of the



Chapel. To pay for it and to put the house on sure footing, he sold his Chateau de Neuville. The stream of his benefactions to us and to other good works never ceased, and he ended by living so poorly that when he was ill, those who visited him were moved to tears. (1)Well, dear daughters, this man, who was generous to the point of heroism, always said he never did anything.

The prioress of one of our houses in Rome obtained a plenary indulgence from the Sovereign Pontiff for this venerated father, which he could also dispose of in favour of several members of his family, as he chose. "Never have I felt such consolation", said he. "Who inspired this Religious with such a beautiful thought?" One could have answered that the Religious was inspired by gratitude.

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1. The Count de Neuville died in December, 1843

### **Our good mother, the Countess d'Andigné.**

Our worthy and devout benefactress, what has she not done for us? (1)

### **Two outstanding Sisters.**

If there have been grateful souls in the Congregation one could well say they were our two virtuous Assistants General Mary of St. Chantal of Jesus and Mary Teresa of Jesus (2) who were moreover also among our great benefactors. They both said to me, "Mother, we never received in the world such a great favour as you did us in accepting us as your daughters." And yet, their fine natural qualities, joined to their wealth made them appear to be very happy in the world. You know their gifts to us, how much they helped us, and you have seen how, at the same time they were simple, obedient, and full of self-denying zeal. All because they were humble and grateful souls, who knew how to appreciate the mighty favour of their vocations, and looked upon themselves as the least of all. Their noble sentiments reflected the nobility of their birth.

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1. Countess d'Andigné died July, 1846
  2. Sr. M. Chantal of Jesus Cesbron de la Roche died May, 1947  
Sr. M. Teresa of Jesus de Couespel died September, 1848

*Reward, O Lord, with eternal life  
all those who do us good. (Liturgy)*

7. It was said of the seraph of Carmel that she was the most grateful woman in the world, a characteristic of her high sanctity. With true humility she wrote to her sisters: "Gratitude is not a virtue in me, but a natural instinct. It is how I am made; in fact, if one were to give me a sardine, I would feel an affectionate gratitude towards the giver."

Our venerated Father Eudes was extremely grateful, and it was obviously his wish that his daughters should cultivate this virtue. In our Constitutions it says: "They shall have a special devotion to the virtue of gratitude, and shall show great thankfulness to their founders and benefactors and towards all their friends."

Frequently pray for all your benefactors whether spiritual or material: go to Communion for their intentions as is prescribed, and beg our Lord to give them everything they need and desire. Imitate the simplicity of that good Franciscan, Brother Giles who, praying to the Blessed Virgin with great devotion said: "My good Mother, grant our benefactors all they ask for; show them how you love those who do us good for your sake, otherwise they will not bring us any more candles to burn before your statue, and then, what would we do?" Everyday say with particular attention the prayer from the liturgy: "Reward, O Lord, our benefactors by giving them eternal blessings."

In the same way, after meals: "Reward, O Lord, with eternal life all those who do us good." Also say the De Profundis for our benefactors with attention, as we leave the refectory.

*Gratitude is the memory of the heart.*

8. Thankfulness gives birth to great and noble thoughts. Ingratitude is abominable! I fear it more than anything. For mercy's sake, my dear daughters, beware of being ungrateful! On the contrary, see to it that thankfulness gives double value to your good actions.

"Gratitude is the memory of the heart", that is the simplest definition of the word. A heart which cannot recall, which cannot cherish a memory, is a mean heart.

While speaking of gratitude I must tell you a story about a certain man of the world. One day he came to the parlour (at Tours) to tell me confidentially about a difficulty of his. I took his trouble to heart and tried to help him as best I could. After the 1830 revolution, and having become one of the top civil servants in the town, he came at once to see me, and said he would be happy to do me a service in his turn; that we had nothing to fear in case of a riot; that he would see we were safe and, if need be, would place police at our door. When we left for Angers, this grateful man found out the time of departure, came to our coach and said to two soldiers who were also travelling: "I recommend these religious to your care, they merit your consideration and respect. Anything you do for them, I shall take as done to myself."

*Write these things on your hearts  
in letters of gold!*

9. Dear daughters, never forget the kindnesses you receive. Show gratitude to your benefactors and towards the Mother House. Thank the Blessed Virgin and, again, express your gratitude to God with whom you are united by eternal bonds. The joy with which a good religious keeps her vows, makes her forget crosses, persecutions, poverty and every suffering.

Her whole life is a hymn of thanksgiving; she will never be downcast, and her state of life will seem to her better than any earthly crown.

I wish everything I have just said were written in letters of gold! One last thing I must say: it is for you, your inheritance; write it on your hearts, tell it over and over to future generations, carry it with you to your missions, speak about it among yourselves in far off lands. May this memory be your consolation, your hope, and so you will always be filled with thankfulness. You will love your vows, exclaiming every day with joy and delight: "We are the children of miracles!"

## CHAPTER 65

### ON THE ANNALS

*"Gather up the pieces so that none may be lost. " (Jn. 6:12)*

1. Yesterday we saw a religious with a great reputation for learning, who had been sent by his superior to deal with us about quite material business. As it was his first visit to Angers, and he had no knowledge of our Institute, he asked numerous questions about our Order and how this house of Angers began. I told him quite simply and with confidence how the work has developed since our Holy Father, Gregory XVI established the Generalate. When I had given him some details, he said very seriously: "But, reverend Mother, you are treading on ground sown with blessings, I would say almost paved with miracles! There are few Religious Orders for whom God has worked such prodigies of grace. Tell me, have you written or got one of your Sisters, to write down the things you have told me?" I replied that several of our sisters jotted down some memoirs. "Gratitude to God obliges you to write your annals. If you fail to do so you will have to render an account for it on judgement day. You could apply to yourselves personally our Lord's words: "Gather up the pieces so that nothing is lost." With all those little details, you could make a delightful dish which will nourish future generations. One of the Generals of our Company said: I think that the fathers who have collected and noted down the facts relative to our beginning, and the spread of our Institute, have done a better work than if they had founded several colleges.' "

*We are treading on ground sown with blessings.*

2. It is indeed very important that, after the study of our Faith and our Rules, we should give ourselves to the study of everything concerning the Congregation.

I must admit from my entry into Religion, I was so eager to know about the origin of the Order, and everything to do with it, that being a novice at Tours, I sought the society of the older religious to talk with them. After the lives of the saints, it was my delight to read the lives in manuscript of some of our first Mothers, the letters of Father Eudes and a short story of his life, at that time not yet printed. When a circular letter came from one of the Refuges, I couldn't sleep at night: it all seemed so wonderful to me! And yet how much was there in those six or eight hand written pages, compared to the circulars we now receive from all over the world, in which we are told of so many and such marvellous conversions among the pagans?

*Every family is proud to keep their traditions alive.*

3. St. Teresa, that lovable saint, says somewhere that one inspires children of noble lineage to become virtuous, by speaking to them about the virtues of their ancestors: one tells them of their adventures, their exploits, their good characteristics and so lead them to become brave and generous as they were. With what pleasure do we not read the story of St. Teresa's foundations! How charmingly she writes! What simplicity and grace in all she recounts!

The cottage has its traditions of honour and piety and every family is proud to keep such memories alive. The children are careful, then, not to tarnish the reputation of their forbears; it is as though the qualities of one generation are reproduced in those who come after. These family feelings serve as encouragement and make it a point of honour to keep on the right road.

What I am now going to say, my dear daughters, will help you to see how unfortunate it is not to have a good grasp of anything relative to the Congregation one belongs to. A long time ago, while travelling with two of our Sisters, we broke the journey, and stayed with a Community, where we were cordially welcomed. In the course of conversation, I asked one of the sisters when this house was founded. She gave me an evasive answer. Then I asked: "What is your foundress's name?" She answered quite naively that she didn't know. I can't tell you what a poor impression that gave us. I would be deeply grieved if any of you found yourself in such a situation; and how much more if a certain spirit of carelessness and indifference crept into the Institute. I hope it will never come to that.

*A tribute of humble thanks to our Venerable Father Eudes.*

No one will forget the name of our Venerable Father John Eudes. Your hymn of thanksgiving will rise ceaselessly to praise God for having inspired this saintly priest to create our Institute, one of the masterpieces of zeal for the salvation of souls. You all ought to know the beginnings of the Institute formed by him.

*To His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI.*

Nor will you ever forget, my dear daughters, that the wonderful favour of being erected into a Generalate was granted us by His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI who sent us the Decree in 1835.

*To the first three Cardinal Protectors.*

Remember, too, that Cardinal Odeschalchi was then made our protector in Rome, and when he laid aside the scarlet to enter the Company of Jesus, Cardinal Della Porta succeeded him, followed by His Eminence Cardinal Patrizzi.

*To His Holiness Pope Pius IX*

Keep alive the memory of His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, who showered us with proofs of his goodness. Speak of him always with reverence and gratitude.

*To Mgr. Montault, Bishop of Angers.*

And could one forget Mgr. Montault, Bishop of Angers, who not only helped in the foundation of this house, but also worked tirelessly for the Generalate.

*To Pere Vaurès, Penitentiary at Rome.*

How much we owe to Pere Vaurès, Penitentiary at Rome who helped considerably in the erection of the Generalate.

*One generation will commend your works to the next;  
they will tell of your mighty deeds. (Ps. 145:4)*

5. Could it ever happen that you would be ignorant of what concerns our Institute and that, if ever you were questioned, you would not know what to answer? No, never, never! I could not imagine that for one instant!

We shall write in our annals the benefactors of the Roman Court: the name of Count Augustine de la Potherie de Neuville, who sold his family mansion, and impoverished himself to raise this house of Angers: the name of Countess d'Andigné de Villequier who has sustained it by her liberality and benevolent affection: the names of our two Assistants General Sister Marie Therese of Jesus de Couespel and Sister Marie-Chantal of Jesus Cesbron de la Roche, who divested themselves of their wealth and impressed us by their obedience and devotedness. Could it ever be that time would efface the memory of these revered names? No, I cannot believe that.

*Everything must be written down  
for those who follow us.*

6. My dear daughters, everything must be written down. I cannot over emphasise the need for all our convents to keep their annals carefully. The annual circulars will be useful in following our history, they will be a new song which will rise from all our 'tribes' to the glory of God.

Once again we ask that the account books in every house be kept very exactly.

The mistresses, too, should have their books, for they must render an exact account of their expenses to the Superior. With regard to the Register of Persons, I know no better method than what I have been shown: one sees at a glance the name of the girl, the date and place of birth, the name of the person who sent her, and to whom she was sent on leaving the house. In fact, dear daughters, take care to keep everything in order, and try to forget nothing. Think what patience our first Mothers had in drawing up the Directory and the customs Book, and don't neglect a single point laid down for us.

## CHAPTER 66

### THE ANNUAL CIRCULARS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CORRESPONDENCE

Do you know, dear daughters, what in my mind I call the annual community Circulars? Well, in my mind I call them Christmas Flowers' December and January are the springtime of the Good Shepherd Year! During these two months we take the opportunity to walk in the fields of the Institute, and gather the flowers whose scent revives and strengthens our zeal. I must admit, that often one of these circulars gives me matter enough for more than a week's meditation. I like to ponder on the acorn our Lady inspired her little slave to cast into the earth. I have seen it develop, growing year by year, and today I see a vigorous oak tree, spreading its branches, displaying its green foliage, and giving shelter to thousands of poor wounded sheep.

It also seems to me that these Community letters are like a field of ripe corn in which the heart finds precious thoughts.

In order that these should be Christmas letters, it is no good sending them, say, in April or June. And to be flowers, they must be written simply without affectations. We offer each other good wishes and loving prayers. Let us recount facts with dignity, but simply. It is possible that, by your interesting information and devout style, you could make our work known and loved, and give the community the pleasure of spending some delightful moments.

We would like you to use the same format as the Customs Book so that each year, they can all be bound together. The seal of the Congregation should be exactly the same size as that of the Mother House. We should begin letters as is laid down in the Book of Customs, with the scriptural sentence before addressing the recipient. Be sure to note the scriptural reference to the sentence. We should sign: "Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers", adding "at Rome etc." not "... the Good Shepherd of Rome." Why? Because we have been approved under the title, "The Good Shepherd of Angers." In that way we are distinguished from other convents who have taken the name of the Good Shepherd, just as the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny are distinguished from many other congregations of St. Joseph, the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres from other congregations of St. Paul.

We end our letters by "Blessed be God" or, "God be Blessed". When we founded a house in a Kingdom, which I admire, it was said to the Superior, who was French, that "Dieu soit beni" could not be translated into the local language, so "Deus Laudetur" would be used instead. We wrote about this to the next superior, who was of the country and very well educated. She answered that "Dieu soit beni" sounded very well in her language, and that she was going to adopt it immediately; and with her Sisters was very happy to conform to the customs of the Congregation. Our dear German Sisters drew our attention to certain expressions which could not be literally translated into German. We submitted their remarks to a person who was highly competent who told us they were quite right. So we allowed them to do what they asked.

Another point: "the titles of Lady or Madam as well as Reverend or your Reverence shall never be given to Sisters or to the Superior." But it is not against this ruling, when addressing letters going by post to put: The Reverend Mother etc...

Be punctual in sending death notices and requesting the suffrages of the Congregation for the souls we have had the sorrow of losing.

## CHAPTER 67

### NEW YEAR GREETINGS

*My consolation and my crown!*

1. What does a mother say when, surrounded by her many children, when the old year is slipping away, and the new one is on the threshold? She looks around at her family, and while her eyes contemplate these young shoots, which she herself has raised, her heart murmurs: "Live and multiply, my consolation and my crown, may your desires live on from generation to generation; and may the Lord continue to shower down on you the gentle dew of his blessings." (cf. *Phil. 4:1, 2ff*) My dear daughters, I make bold to address these words to you, for you are, indeed, my joy and consolation.

*May your vows be the star which leads you.*

2. This is my wish to you who are gathered round me, to you who work in so many beautiful and holy works, and to your companions who have landed on far-off shores, and whose lives are consumed for the glory of God and the saving of souls. Live and multiply, go and people the earth! may your vows be the star which leads you, the compass which guides you, and may zeal be the ship that carries you on.

For all of you I wish that the most tender charity, and sincere affection may always be, as it has been in the past, the rule and the soul of all your thoughts and actions. Those who are in the Mother House should, as it were, embrace the Foundations; and those in the Foundations must love the Mother House and the whole of the Congregation, in the same way. For some I wish better health. Their sufferings have grieved us; would that their strength would respond to their desire to help our Congregation !

*Live the interior life - a life of prayer.*

3. Above all, of course, be vigorous in virtue. Should you happen to fall, get up at once and go fight on. Make it a habit to live the interior life, a life of prayer; that way you will enable your souls to carry out God's plan. I beg you to continue in perfect docility to the voice of your Superiors, and you will be sure of never straying.

In a word, my dear daughters, be holy because you serve a God who is holy and whose will it is that you should be saints. (cf. *Lev. 11:44*) That sums up my heart's desires for you.

You who have made your vows will become holy by the accomplishment of these sacred promises. Love your vows, practise them by dying to yourselves. We should be able to say with St. Paul "I die daily." (*1 Cor. 15:31*)

*We must suffer something.*

4. What life could be more beautiful than that of a Religious who, offering herself day by day to God as a living victim, and only concerned about pleasing the Lord, is able eventually to say with St. Paul: "I live, but it is not I that live, it is Christ Jesus who lives in me!" (*Gal. 2:20*) And again, "God forbid that I should glory in anything but the Cross of Jesus Christ." (*Gal. 6:14*) If we want to work for God's glory, we must suffer something. Our Sisters, who found houses, have a lot of work, many obstacles and many privations; those are their sufferings. You, my dear daughters, have difficulties in carrying out your different occupations, often much weariness; and you share the suffering of other houses because, when it becomes necessary to help one of them, you immediately give up your most capable aide; if we have to help others financially you redouble your economies and your work.

Then you have the laws of holiness which I hope you will observe constantly.

*Rejoice, though for a little while you  
may have had to suffer. (cf. Pet. 1:6)*

5. Be more and more convinced of the gravity of your obligations towards penitent souls. That is one of the most heartfelt of my wishes, grateful though I am that our Congregation has already made strides in that direction, by God's grace. But while we see the Lord extending our works, giving us new souls to save, we must, on our part, redouble our thirst and zeal for our progress in holiness.

So, my dear daughters, you must never give up praying, struggling and suffering, or rather, you must consider yourselves fortunate to be obliged to pray, struggle and suffer. You must remember that, for you this is the golden age, that is, the age of fervour. Later the sisters who follow you will probably experience less poverty and hard work than you. Well, perhaps they will not be as happy as you, and would perhaps wish they had lived in your day.

*My days are counted.*

6. Finally, let us make good use of the years God gives us. One of them will be our last, and who among us can assert whether it will not be she of whom, at the next New Year, it will be said: "How sad that she is not here to receive our greetings! Her body is dust and her soul has been judged." The holy patriarch Job said: "My days are counted." (Job 14:5) We can say the same. How many of our dear Sisters who thought they would see the old year out, are now in Eternity, their days already counted. And how many of you here will not be so next year! What food for thought! If our days are counted, so also are faults against the vows we had the happiness to make, infidelities against the Rule and Observances. However we must not give way to discouragement, but begin the New Year in such dispositions, that we may have nothing to fear if we are called before our Sovereign Judge. Let us live in such a way that we are prepared to die everyday, and life will be a foretaste of the unimaginable delights of heaven.



## CHAPTER 68

### AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1864 (The last re-election of our Beloved Mother Mary of Saint Euphrasia Pelletier.)

*Your love has guided the people you redeemed,  
Your power has led them to your holy dwelling place. (Ex. 15:17, 18)*

1. How consoling it is to be all together today! How happy I am, my dear daughters, to have you all round me, to see the warm charity, the peace and the spirit of union which reign among us! None are strangers to each other. Americans, English, Irish, German, Italians, French and so on. You are all of one heart and mind. You revive my courage which sometimes falters. Oh, yes, this is God's work. He will keep you all in his Heart.

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. (Ps. 84:4)*

2. Long ago the feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in Jerusalem. It was a feast of solemn reunion, a feast of thanksgiving, which the Lord himself ordered Moses to have celebrated by his people, in memory of His special protection during the forty years in the desert. At the appointed time, every tribe set out joyfully, coming from all parts to keep the feast. It was a cause of deep regret for those who could not go; and every family sent at least its head or one of its members, who went with joy in the name of the others. Arrived in Jerusalem, the travellers assembled in the open spaces and erected tent-like shelters called tabernacles, which they covered with greenery. The citizens joined them, and during the eight days of the feast they lived nowhere else so that they should never forget how God had protected and blessed them in the desert, where they lived in tents. All took part in the prayers and sacrifices: one of the elders read from the Law and each tribe corrected any unlawful behaviour among its members. The religious meetings were interspersed with chants and the playing of musical instruments. And of course, they did not forget to get together for happy re-unions and friendly meals.

*I will praise your name for your love  
and your faithfulness. (Ps. 138:2)*

3. Could one not say, my dear daughters, that this is what is happening among you, at our Mother House? Seeing you, my heart over-flows with gratitude and joy and is carried back in thought to the beautiful feast of Tabernacles, which the people of God celebrated in Jerusalem with so much solemnity. Isn't it true that all the tribes of Israel have vied in coming to keep this feast of thanksgiving in their Jerusalem, in this beloved Sion, where the Lord has so abundantly blessed this new people which it has pleased him to choose? Isn't it true that each of our families is represented by its leader? Oh, yes, you must sing together David's beautiful psalm: "Quid Retribuam." "How can I repay the Lord" (Ps. 116:12) Be happy, enjoy yourselves together, re-read our holy Law, renew your vows, thank God for all he has brought to pass in your Congregation. Love it now and always. I dare to say that if you love your vocation and your vows, if you always love each other, if you uphold each other, you will be able to work prodigies and will go straight to heaven.

*From Rome comes help and light.*

4. This spirit of charity, simplicity and thankfulness is the life and soul of your Institute. With that you have everything and God will continue to send down on you the dew of his blessings. What is more, it is only by these means, that you will be able to win souls for God.

As members of the Institute, you should all have its very spirit, for you have been formed by it and for it; and why do you think I say that you must have the spirit of Congregation and cherish it? I say it because it is very closely united to the Church, because it has the blessing and the protection of the Church, because the head of the Church is your highest superior on two counts: as Christians and as Religious. Sometimes we are battered by terrible storms, sometimes we are plunged into utter darkness; then we look towards Rome; from there comes help and light. Notice another thing, dear

daughters, when the head of the Church suffers, so do we, when the barque of Peter is tossed about, our frail, little boat is shaken too. Then it is that we must hold fast to this barque which cannot perish and we shall be saved. I saw the truth of this very clearly on my journey to Rome! A frightful storm arose, our boat seemed to be breaking up but our watchful pilot said: "Don't be afraid, the vessel's steer is strong, it will never sink." He held the tiller with a firm hand and he never took his eye off the boat except to plot his course from the sky. A crowd of small boats all around us were tossed about like cockle shells. Two poor fishermen in one of them were about to be swamped when the cry went up: "Lower the life boat! " Two strong sailors bent to it, and by dint of courage and strong oars they succeeded in saving them. The passengers gathered round and congratulated them; and the little boat, made fast to our ship, defied the mighty waves.

Let us always steer our little boat towards Rome;  
we shall have nothing to fear.

5. In all this I seem to see an image of our Mother House, of this little boat so often battered by storms, and which has struck so many crags! It would certainly have perished if it were not bound by strong ties to the holy ship of the Church. So, in our voyages, let us always steer our little boat towards Rome, and we shall have nothing to fear.

Angers will always be your little boat and I, your poor pilot, will always be quick to help you, to save you; her arms will always be open to receive you.

You are ever busy leading souls back to the Good Shepherd, you are raising churches in His honour, and that is why the Vicar of Jesus Christ takes so much interest in our Congregation. He likes nothing better than to see devotion to the Blessed Sacrament increase and religion to spread abroad, above all in certain countries such as England, Ireland, Africa, America etc ... As I see it, the foundation of our London house is an outstanding achievement. The fact that we succeeded in founding a convent in a Protestant Kingdom, overcoming obstacles raised by many enemies, and that now we are enjoying the protection of the country is, certainly, a wonder worked by the Lord's mercy. Let us hope, then, for the same blessing on other houses which we hope to establish soon.

*What upholds our Institute?  
It is the union between us,  
it is obedience.*

6. Do you know whence comes this special protection of God? Do you know why we can extend everywhere? I repeat it is because of our attachment to the Church, our Mother! What a consolation to know that our dear Congregation works for the good of the Church always. Everything passes, but the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church will not pass. Again, do you know what draws down God's special protection, which upholds our Institute and gives it such strength? It is the union between us, it is obedience; in a word, it is the spirit of unity. Should this spirit ever fail our work will disappear, the Congregation will become like a beautiful tree whose leaves wither, and which produces no fruit, because a worm has devoured it interiorly, and caused the root to dry up. For mercy's sake, my dear daughters, see to it that such a disaster may never happen! Keep your present spirit look, pass it on to future generations, and your Congregation will always be like a tree planted by running waters, extending everywhere its branches, covered with leaves, flowers and fruit.

*From Angers has gushed the same fountain of grace  
which has watered the whole terrain of the Good Shepherd.*

7. An ecclesiastic, benefactor to one of our houses once said to me: " I wonder at the divine inspiration which led you to put your Institute under the safeguard of unity. (1) I admire the Sovereign Pontiff for not wanting another Mother House, not even in Rome. This union is, in fact, your defence and your support, and by the strength it gives you, you will extend your branches far and wide. Look at the universe, there is only one sun which warms and unifies it. It is the same for you. Your sun is a single heart and this heart is here in Angers, animating you all."

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1. The Good Shepherd Congregation was among the first to seek to change the practice of separate, autonomous houses and unite them all under one leadership.

Never forget, dear daughters, the centre of unity for all of you should always be this land of Angers. You must consider it a blessed land, a kind of holy land. It is here that all the tribes of Israel must come together, and here the Mother House must always be. It must never be transplanted. The thanks you owe to God would never allow that to happen.

Here there should be a general Novitiate, so that, from the Mother House sisters would go forth imbued with the same spirit. From Angers has gushed the same fountain of grace which has watered the whole terrain of the Good Shepherd. May no one ever wish to turn off this spring of blessings and mercy which God himself opened. Angers is the cradle of your religious infancy, the centre of your affections, its memory never to be effaced.

*One day all the weariness of travel  
will be forgotten in the Kingdom  
of happiness, peace and unity.*

8. The feast of Tabernacles was celebrated by the people of God every year. It was named as a special feast. God ordained that the law prescribing this feast should be commemorated by all succeeding generations; having in mind, also, to make them understand as they made these journeys annually that they were a people in transit, and pilgrims.

Our solemn reunions do not occur frequently, but their memory should be passed on to future generations so that they have an affectionate respect for them. Happy those who will have occasion to make this pilgrimage, to renew their vows in this sacred enclosure and to preserve for posterity the spirit of zeal and unity which is the life of this Institute! Their life's journey will be blessed and one day they will arrive at the beautiful "City built on firm foundations", (Ps. 122:3) of which God himself is the founder and architect. There, all the weariness of travel will be forgotten. If it is true that, even in this world, our life of affection and union allows us to savour days of joy and indescribable delight; what will it be like when chosen souls who have served the Lord, find themselves in the Kingdom of happiness, peace and eternal unity!

O Sacred Institute, I shall die in your arms and you will carry me to the Heart of my God.

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