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Devotion to St. Joseph leads to Interior Life and Union with Our Lord

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

St. Joseph's month began yesterday. We cannot keep all the "months" that are kept by the devout, because the Divine Office has the first claim on our time and strength. However, since the Church honours St. Joseph at this time, we should try to couple devotion to him with devotion to the Passion that must occupy us during Lent. It would be well then to make our first meditation on the Passion, and to meditate on St. Joseph's virtues at our second meditation or at a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or at some other moment; and I suggest that we make this meditation from the point of view of the interior life.

I know that you all wish to be interior souls. But what St. Francis de Sales says of perfection can also be said of the interior life: each one has her own way of dressing it up; each has her own way of picturing it to herself. One will think: "I know what will succeed for me: nothing else will". Another will say something else. Well, no, Sisters. The sure way to attain to the interior life is the way of prayer and sacrifice. Look here, there, and everywhere for ideas on the interior life, and of perfection. You will always find that they are founded on these two things: prayer and sacrifice.

First, prayer. This is easy for a religious of the Assumption, both because we spend a lot of time in the chapel, and because, apart from the time of prayer, we can easily remain in the spirit of prayer in our various occupations. There is enough silence and regular observance in the house, and difficulties are sufficiently removed, for us to be able to find solitude in our hearts, and live in recollection and prayer. The spirit of prayer is what fosters Faith and Hope and Charity and leads to union with Our Lord which is the true essence of the interior life.

Look at St. Joseph. See how separated he was from creatures. And look at the events of his life. How hard they must have been for him to understand. They would be hard for us to understand if we had not meditated on them from our childhood. He had to go as a refugee to a foreign country where he did not understand the language. But he never let go of his interior life. You may say: "He had Our Lord and Our Lady with him". That is true. But we have them too. We have Holy Communion: we have Our Lord in the tabernacle; we can pray to Him, and talk to Him and we can ask Him for all we want. And Our Lady is our Mother. She will never desert us. She is very attentive to our prayers. Legends of the Middle Ages show how she values the love of her children when they have recourse to her and show her due honour

and trust. She even came to reproach a student who once neglected his daily devotions to her. She is a Queen. How great are her power and her mercy! She is solicitous for the Universal Church and has a special solicitude for the Virgins who follow in her wake, for the monks and nuns who live under her patronage and bear her name. It is impossible to doubt that she is near us when we call on her.

So what we lack is not Jesus and Mary, but faith, hope and charity, and union with Our Lord.

Union with Our Lord has various degrees but in every one of us it must exist at least in its initial stage. The way to make this union closer is to put ourselves often under the influence of Jesus and Mary: to look at them and to imitate their virtues, and above all to be silent. Silence is the great means. How could one pray if one did not keep silence exteriorly and strive to keep it interiorly? And if one did not acquire the habit of imposing silence on thoughts about self, on self-will, on all the noisy talk that goes on in one's mind, so as to be able to talk to Jesus and Mary?

There are various degrees in all this. If a novice who has recently left the world has not yet imposed silence on the inner world that she brought with her that is not very surprising. But if a professed Sister who left the world a long time ago still has a talkative little world within her it is much more serious. Pay great attention to this, Sisters; it is important. If year by year one imposes more and more silence on one's tongue when it wants to talk uselessly, and on one's mind when it indulges in thoughts that are not of the kingdom of God, one ends by establishing that interior silence in which the soul can be united with our Lord. That is a thing that touches not only on the spirit of prayer but also on the spirit of sacrifice. "You will make progress only in so far as you do violence to yourself" says St. Francis Xavier and the Imitation and all the Saints.

The spirit of sacrifice is needed to keep up the spirit of prayer; and the spirit of prayer is needed to lead you to the spirit of sacrifice if your interior life is to thrive, because the interior life cannot get on with any of our faults and vices. Does that seem a strong word? Yet what can I call them? If imperfect habits, bad moods, become habitual, they are like vices: the vice of pride, the vice of cowardice, of impatience, of touchiness. For the interior life to flourish all that must be got rid of, and this requires the sacrifice of everything – of our consolations, or rather of our pleasures.

Have we any pleasures? Yes. Some things give us pleasure, others don't. Some things afford amusement to our minds, others don't. We should like to indulge in some things, not in others. I speak of such things as these, not of the pleasures of the world. If I were to say "consolations" I might give you a false idea, because the word "consolations" generally means good things that come from above and there is no need to sacrifice them. There are things that give buoyancy to the soul, that lift it up to God and should not be sacrificed. Nor should you sacrifice whatever in prayer, in all your Religious Life inspires you with generosity and fervour. There are folks who say: "I give up all that, I make a sacrifice of it. I do not need consolation". Well, they make a mistake: they are imprudent. God knows what you need. Be grateful for what He gives you.

Your satisfactions – that is the right word, that is what must be sacrificed. The sacrifice of your satisfactions is what will make room for consolations. The satisfactions of nature are an obstacle to the consolations of grace, and hinder union with God. In so far as you sacrifice them, do without them, refuse to indulge them, cease to like them and seek them, turning your

desires away from them, so far will you be able to live a life in which Our Lord heaps favours on the soul, fills it with light and becomes its all.

If you detach yourself from external things and from merely personal interests, you can turn your whole attention to Our Lord, whether in Holy Communion or in the tabernacle, whether in His various mysteries or in His presence everywhere. That is what makes an interior soul. To shut your eyes, and adopt a self-conscious way of walking certainly does not! Some people do that and are certainly not interior souls. Others are full of simplicity and kindness and a welcoming spirit. They see Our Lord everywhere, they follow Him, and obey Him, and offer Him sacrifices and acts of love and faith and hope. Those people are interior souls. I feel sure St. Joseph was like that, friendly, kind, easy to deal with. Though he did not like talking, he would never have refused you a consoling word or a kind smile if you had met him on the road or gone to his house.

Do not forget, Sisters, that when I speak of devotion to St. Joseph I mean the kind of devotion that makes for interior souls, who want to share his love for Jesus and Mary, and who strive to imitate his virtues. I by-pass the devotion that only wants to get this from this dear, kind Saint. There are people whose devotion to St. Joseph consists in asking him to get their daughters married or to make their families rich. This is a form of devotion that puts some people off, and that has no connection with ours. We have better things to ask for, not so much temporal things as spiritual gifts that will help us to develop our interior life. And those are the graces to ask for also when we meditate on the Passion, the great, grand source of interior life. Our Blessed Lord's Cross is the fountain-head of the spirit of sacrifice, of strength, of silence, because it was above all on the way to Calvary that Our Lord showed the strength of His silence, the strength of His abnegation.

We have to try to put ourselves under Our Blessed Lord's influence at meditation for the whole day. I should like each of you to put herself anew under His influence every quarter of an hour and say: "My God, what do you want of me? How can I be like you?" "What do you desire now, O Christ?"¹ as St. Vincent de Paul used to repeat so often. What would Christ Our Lord do in my place now? What must I do to be faithful to whatever grace He is offering me now? That is the way to succeed, by one means or another, in putting ourselves under His influence so that you will depend on Him, imitate Him, be one with Him, and lead an interior life that will be truly alive.



¹ Quid nunc Christ us?