

**ON THE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART
MANIFESTED BY THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE**

3 June 1881

My dear Daughters,

We are beginning the month which is dedicated to the Sacred Heart; and since we have not yet spoken of this devotion together, I wish today, to say some words about it, from the point of view which seems to me to be the most practical for Religious.

When Our Lord showed His Sacred Heart to Blessed Margaret Mary, He showed it to her surrounded with thorns, pierced deeply; and when He said to her: “*Behold this Heart which has so loved men,*” He also said to her: “*Behold this Heart which has suffered so much for love of men.*” What shall we give back to Our Lord for this love if it is not the spirit of sacrifice? It is the spirit of sacrifice which is the measure of the good religious, which makes her holy and fervent. If she always has this spirit, if she makes of everything which comes her way a big or a little sacrifice, she is holy, fervent and she loves Our Lord. I think that this is the great devotion we should have to the Sacred Heart. So look and see what spirit of sacrifice there is in you and seek to enlarge it. It can be applied to everything.

To begin with, Our Lord teaches us to apply it to bodily sufferings. This is not a small matter, believe me, to have a heavy, unwieldy body which causes keen suffering, which stops at every instant; but what good is that if one does not make of it a sacrifice to God? Everyone has his share of suffering in this world. The impious are not better treated than we. They have sorrows, diverse illnesses; only, they receive them with irritation, casting all the burden of

their sufferings upon those who surround them. They bear suffering, or rather, they undergo it, but they do not know how to offer it to God.

For us, as soon as intense sufferings come, we must accustom ourselves to offering them to God, stripping ourselves as much as we can of self, speaking about them as little as possible in order to accustom ourselves to keeping suffering between God and self.

At the same time, remember that as religious, it is a matter of obedience that you tell your Superior your smallest infirmities, and that you inform her if these become worse. You ought to do this since you no longer belong to yourself. But there is a great difference between accomplishing this point of the Rule and falling back upon oneself.

The Religious Life passes, so to speak, between two poles. One is that of generosity, of sacrifice, of humility, of all the virtues in which one forgets self for the love of God; it is the love of God pushed to the point of self-contempt. The other is not, as for worldly people, the pole of evil and of sin, but it is that of a natural life in which one falls back upon self and abandons little by little, the spirit of generosity and of sacrifice. Instructing a lady who, after having gone through the other states of life, wished to consecrate herself to God, Bossuet said that when the person makes a break from everything that is exterior, she must come to God with her whole heart; because when she does not yield herself to God, she falls back on something better than exterior things, and that something is herself. So we must be very careful that the spirit of sacrifice accompany us ceaselessly so that we do not fall back on ourselves.

What I have said about the sufferings of the body, I say especially of all the occasions which involve our egoism: it is there that constant sacrifice is necessary in order not to give in either to pride or to self-love. St. Augustine says that the first Christian virtue is humility. When someone asked him what is the second, he answered: humility. And what is the third? Again he replied, humility. Then they asked, when would you name another? He replied: All the virtues are based on humility; it is humility which makes the Christian and the Religious; where there is no humility, neither is there a Christian nor a Religious, because humility is the renunciation of oneself. The spirit of generosity must therefore be with us continually, to enable us to welcome the sacrifices which present themselves at every moment with regard to self-love, to the destruction of that which is “self”, because that, above all, is difficult.

Notice also that if the heart of Our Lord is painfully pierced, if He has shown it surrounded with the thorns which crowned his head, He has also asked Blessed Margaret Mary to adore Him especially at the hour dedicated to the memory of his agony in the Garden of Olives; because if Our Lord suffered in his body, He has suffered still more at the sight of our sins. The burden of our sins which His Divine Heart has deigned to accept presents horror to his divinity and to his holiness; and the Garden of Olives has been the agony of the heart of Our Lord. There He sees himself before His Father weighed down with all the sins of the world. Deserted by all, abandoned by his disciples who slept, He allowed sadness and fear to approach his sacred humanity. He would see the uselessness of his blood and of his sufferings for a great number of souls; He would see the miserable result that His sufferings would bear in other souls, to whose number we ought to fear to belong. Because if there are souls who do not profit of all the blood of Our Lord,

there are others who give one for one when they ought to give thirty for one, a hundred for one, and even three hundred for one, as is said of St. John the Baptist who sanctified all the ways of his life, seeing that he has become for the Faith, virgin, martyr, apostle, prophet and hermit.

So then, Sisters, what character shall we give our sanctity in order to console the heart of Our Lord? What measure of abasement, of self-denial, of complete acceptance, - generous and faithful, - will Our Lord find in us each time He sends us something which would destroy our egoism? That is the question which we ought to ask ourselves in order to have generosity in spiritual sufferings as well as in bodily afflictions. Then, one can say to God: “My God, it is a sacrifice... I thank you for it; I offer it to you with all my heart. I do not need long reasoning to know where it comes from or whither it goes; it is enough for me to know that you have sent it to me, in order that I unite myself to so great and complete a sacrifice, to your Sacred Heart from which I have received all.”

I believe that it is above all from this point of view that we ought to envisage the devotion to the Sacred Heart in order to establish within us the generosity, the love of sacrifice, the acceptance of all the trials of soul, of the spirit, of the body, which God might send us.

Now I am going to anticipate an objection. Many souls would like to give God something which they have invented; and the more it is of their own making, the more they attach themselves to it. It is quite contrary, Sisters, to the order of perfection. That which God sends us is worth infinitely more than that which we invent; everything which is chosen by Him is more necessary for our

sanctification than that which we choose, though these acts might also be excellent in themselves.

By that I do not wish to say that we should no longer perform acts of humility and of mortification. We ought to do them in order to dispose ourselves to accept those which come; but I call upon your experience - when a good humiliation comes to you, would you not have done better (by accepting it,) than by performing one of your own choosing? When Providence sends you a suffering, some sorrow, does it not cost you more than does the discipline which you might have taken? It is then that you ought to say to God: “Yes, my God, I desire it, I accept it.” This is what we ought to say in face of all the sacrifices which happen around our heart, in the face of all privations. This is what Our Lord did.

When Jesus stayed in the Temple at Jerusalem and said to His Mother: “*Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*”¹; when later He left the Blessed Virgin to go out to preach; when, along the road to Calvary He met his holy Mother, and as He continued his journey, leaving her in sorrow, do you think that Our Lord did not feel within his heart, so tender and so loving, a great pain? Nevertheless, Our Lord made this sacrifice. He wished to be abandoned, forsaken by all; and if we have to pass through this kind of pain, we ought to draw the generosity (to do so,) from the Heart of Our Lord.

Every individual has suffering to which he is most sensitive. For one, it is that of affection and of the will; for another, it is interior pains, moments of dryness. Whatever it be, one ought to say to God: “My God, the sacrifice You have prepared for me is the one I

¹ Lk. 2:49

prefer above all others; I accept it with my whole heart in order that You might, little by little, prepare me for the complete sacrifice of myself.” I believe that if you observe the month of the Sacred Heart this way, you will be most pleasing to Our Lord, and you will love Him more. That is the purpose of the Religious Life: the increase of the love which makes us please God above anyone else and in which God wants us to grow everyday without losing a single one of the moments which He grants us on earth.
