



*13 January 1878*

### Devotion to the Saints of the Gospel

#### **Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus**

My dear Daughters,

You have had a beautiful sermon, and I urge you to develop M. Tardif's recommendation to look up at the countless multitude of saints in Heaven, to find protectors and models among them.

At the Assumption we have the advantage of honouring the Saints day by day as their feasts come round in the liturgy. So it is easy for us to study their character and spirit and virtues in the Legend<sup>1</sup> we read at Readings and to ask with Mother Church for the special grace she prays for.

You remember the advice of the Bishop of Poitiers<sup>2</sup>, to get to know the Collects<sup>3</sup> of the Office. He said that priests and bishops are told at their Ordination to study the Epistles and Gospels and all that the Church gives them to read. Well since you recite the breviary I advise you to study each collect. It is the chief prayer of the day, repeated at all the Canonical Hours and at Mass, when, as it were, it "collects"<sup>4</sup> the Church's desires and intentions and shows us the special grace to ask for on each saint's feast day. Turnover in your mind the virtues proper to each one, and the particular grace asked for in the Collect. This is an excellent way of honouring the Saints.

I most particularly recommend devotion to the Saints of the Gospel. This seems especially congenial to us Religious of the Assumption who should be penetrated with the Gospel spirit. We feed our souls by meditating on the mysteries of Our Lord and Our Lady so that we live in their intimacy. Isn't it right that we should make friends with those who were special friends of Jesus on earth? And first of all with Apostles. This follows from our belonging to an apostolic congregation and from our strong attachment to the See of Peter. So take St. Peter,

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<sup>1</sup> "Legend": word used in the liturgy for the readings at Matins on the lives of the saints

<sup>2</sup> Monseigneur Pie, Bishop of Poitiers

<sup>3</sup> "Collects": word used in the liturgy for the prayers of the Mass

<sup>4</sup> Thus the word "collect"

St. Paul, St. John, St. Bartholomew, and so on. Each one has personal characteristics that we can try to imitate.

Next come Our Lord's close friends Martha and Mary and Lazarus. What a consolation for us that when the Gospel names those whom Jesus honoured with His friendship the first to be mentioned are women! We ought to have great devotion to St. Martha and St. Mary Magdalene. They were such intimate friends of Our Lord and their prayers will help us to follow Him in His mysteries and to imitate Him.

We French people have a special reason for loving Martha and Mary because when they left their country with Mary and James and Salome they came to live in France which had the honour of possessing the bodies of most of Our Lord's friends. First there was the Bethany group, St. Lazarus who became Bishop of Marseilles. St. Mary Magdalene who retires in solitude of the St. Baume, and St. Martha, the very first religious, who lived at Tarascon with the community she had gathered together, and gave herself to prayer and apostolate trying to convert the people of the neighbourhood. France received other friends of Our Lord: St. Zaccheus honoured at Rocamadour, and St. Martial who is said to have been the little child whom Jesus called to His side and showed to His apostles saying: "Unless you change and become like little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>5</sup>.

No need to mention St. Joseph, the first Saint of the Gospel, nor St. John the Baptist of whom Our Lord said that God had raised up no greater son of woman<sup>6</sup>. We owe special devotion, and should count on his prayers. Notice what a high place the Church gives him: he is named in the Confiteor and he has several feasts one of which, his birthday, has an octave.

Cultivate a devotion to Our Lady's people, to St. Joachim and St. Anne her parents, to St. Elisabeth her cousin, and to all the gospel saints. That is the way to be intimate with the Holy Family.

I believe a sure way of growing in devotion to the Sacred Heart is to imitate the people who had especially warm places in that Heart, and who were chosen by Our Lord to be His special friends. We should show them greater affection, pray oftener to them, and hold them in higher honour so that they may help us to become friends of the Sacred Heart.

We ask daily for a great love of God. Sisters, we should also ask Jesus to love us. There is great sweetness in this, and besides, it is just and right. "I ask not so much merit as for grace", says St. Augustine. What does "grace" mean here? It means "favour"; it means a look of love cast on a soul by Jesus, a very great favour indeed, and one that has been bestowed on you, every one of you. When He called you it was by a look of preference. Ask Him so, to look on you always. What moved Him thus to look on you? Love. He loved the rich young man whom He called to follow Him and who refused the friendship offered by Jesus. Thank God we did not do that! We listened, and we came. Often ask Our Lord to cast on you this look of friendship.

We must never doubt God's love, Sisters. To doubt Our Lord's love is the road to ruin. There are, it is true, different degrees in this as in everything. Our Lord loves all the souls He died for. But obviously the love He lavishes on St. John, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Lazarus was a love of preference. Ask these great Saints to admit us into their company into their intimacy,

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<sup>5</sup> Mt 18:3

<sup>6</sup> Mt 11:11

where there is great faith and respect, with great freedom and love. Martha was not afraid of asking Our Lord anything. “Lord”, she said to Him, “I know well that God will grant whatever You ask of Him”<sup>7</sup>. There is no lack of faith or respect in her familiarity. And when Jesus said: “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me though he is dead will live. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord”, she said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God who have come into this world”<sup>8</sup>...the most beautiful profession of faith in the whole Gospel! More beautiful and more complete than St. Peter’s. He had said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”<sup>9</sup>. Martha added “Who have come into this world”, a world that thrills us with faith and love. And that was said by a simple woman. What simple faith! You see now how well adoration, respect and faith go with love and freedom. That shows what a religious’ devotion should be like. Based on faith and respect, love and trust in Our Lord’s kindness can ask anything. It is true that Our Lord once refused Martha what she asked. When she said: “Lord, bid my sister help me”<sup>10</sup>, He did not do so, but neither did He chide her. Only He said: “Mary has chosen the better part which will never be taken from her”<sup>11</sup>.

Never fear to offend Our Lord by your simplicity. He wants you to come to Him with your love trusting His love for you. Go to Him with trust and simplicity, grounded on faith and respect. He wants you to intimate with Him as they were at Bethany, going to Him in the Blessed Sacrament, serving Him, working for Him, staying at His feet like St. Mary Magdalene, repeating St. Martha’s word of faith: “I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who has come into the world and that he who believes in You will not die”.

St. Martha believed in eternal life, and she meant that one who believed in Our Lord would not easily die the death of sin, but would remain attached to Christ Our Lord.

It is a source of great joy to be able to say to Jesus Christ: “I know You will not let my soul die. I know that if I fall You will raise me up. I know not only that I shall rise again on the last day, but that if I remain attached to You by love and trust I shall never die the terrible death of separation from God.”



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<sup>7</sup> Jn 11:21-22

<sup>8</sup> Jn 11:25-27

<sup>9</sup> Mt 16:16

<sup>10</sup> Lk 10:40

<sup>11</sup> Lk 10:42