

Sunday, 10 February 1878

May the Religious of the Assumption imitate Pius IX in his love of truth and of the Church and souls; as also in his devotion to prayer, Office and the Blessed Sacrament.

I cannot but speak of Pius IX at this moment when he fills all thoughts and hearts. I will not dwell on the filial grief one feels when God takes to Himself such a father as Pius IX.

I am inclined to consider him as a saint already, not only as one to whom we should pray, but also, and this may seem strange to you, as one whom the Religious of the Assumption should imitate. An immense difference may be felt between the life of a Sovereign Pontiff who is responsible for all the souls in the world and that of a poor religious in her cell. However, several aspects of the life of Pius IX, can serve us as a model.

Before all else, Pius IX was wholly given to truth. Who more than he labored to extend the kingdom of truth on earth by issuing dogmas or by condemning errors? He constantly supported combats for truth; he defended the truth, suffered for the truth. Like our Lord who said to Pilate: "I am come to bear witness to the truth."⁵ He courageously and at all times bore witness to the truth.

This love of truth is one of the characteristics we should possess. Was it not this virtue that attracted St. Augustine and drew him to God? Dogmatic truths, the eternal truths of God revealed to man in a word, all the admirable truth that are the object of faith. So for us sisters, this eternal truth should be our first and principal love. Note that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals Himself in truth to the world and we receive this truth through the Church.

We come now to the second love, love of Pius IX – love, of the Church. Since the Pope was wholly given to the truth he was also wholly given to the Church. He bore the weight of the Church. He worked and fought for it. His life was a constant sacrifice for the Church. How many instances during his long pontificate can be seen of his efforts to maintain it where it was already established

⁵ John 18, 37

and to extend it where it had not yet penetrated. What great work he did for the conversion of souls, for the edification of the faithful. He was always vigilant to correct errors, fight illusions and establish order. He loved the Church as the pillar of truth on earth.

We, sisters, who have the special characteristic of attachment to the See of Peter, center of truth, should consecrate our whole life to the love and service of the Church as he did. We should obey in all matters, we should pray, work and suffer for it and our lives should be constantly devoted to the Church.

This love of truth and of the Church gave Pius IX a great love of souls. I think I have already told you how, when I visited Rome the first time, what struck me most was his care of souls. One felt that the poorest and most sinful, the elderly, all – no matter who they might be – were the object of a constant and maternal solicitude in Rome.

The parish priests knew every family in their parishes and were concerned about each one. They knew those who had made their Easter duties, those who were tempted and those who fell. For example, when a young girl, blinded by passion, risked falling into sin, the priest arranged with her father that she should follow a retreat in one of the convents in the city intended for this purpose and later arranged a suitable marriage for her.

In spite of the authority and solicitude of the priests, the parishioners felt free to seek help from any confessor, even outside their parish. For the good of souls, only learned, virtuous priests who were not too young, were allowed to hear confessions and they had to pass an examination before this was granted to them. the highest dignitaries of the Church like the Master of the Sacred Palace or the Chief Inquisitor were ready to hear the confessions of any young girl or woman who approached them.

What great zeal!

Bishops could be seen entering garrets to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a child of seven or eight, already baptized who risked dying without the zeal of this sacrament which could make him a perfect Christian.

One of the things that most touched me was to see the immense

care for souls shown by the head of the Church and passing on to those whom he ruled.

Later on, Pius IX, held prisoner in the Vatican, showed the same love of souls when he welcome the throngs of pilgrims and gave audiences to everyone, even the poorest. He did so much for souls not only in Rome but throughout the world that it seemed this was his veritable passion.

Reflect on all this and ask yourselves. In my soul do I have an immense love of souls and the Church which leads me to seek not only their salvation but all that can make them more beautiful and pleasing to God? Is not this the spirit of the Assumption?

A religious should notice another aspect of the life of Pius IX. This was his great regularity. What other king or ruler has to deal with so many people? Who is in touch with China, the furthestmost parts of Africa or islands lost in the oceans? Every day Pius IX communicated with the whole world. He ruled over the scattered Christians in Asia, those persecuted in northern Europe, those all over the Americas and in different islands. He was concerned and occupied with them all, neglecting none, yet his life remained regular.

Everyday he rose at the same hour, he spent long hours in prayer, an example for us and a thing he never neglected. He said his own Mass and then assisted at a second. He prepared for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice by a long period of prayer, sometimes in the night, always in the morning and he also prayed at length in the evening.

He had great devotion to the Divine Office which he recited with his chaplain, a holy person, for only prayerful priests of great purity of life were chosen by Pius IX to be near him. Thus, Msgr. Marinelli, his confessor, had a great reputation in Rome and when I said, "he looks like a saint", I was told, "But he is a saint."

Pius IX denied himself all that was unnecessary even if he were not particularly austere. Once, when he was very old, Msgr. Marinelli offered him some brandy sent to him. The Pope answered, "it would be much better to give it to the poor men who carry me in the Seda Gestatoria." His life was simple and frugal and he would not even take a tonic often given to old people to fortify them.

His life was one of great patience in suffering and he suffered a great deal! A lady recently in Rome told me that she heard him groaning as he was placed in the chair which brought him to the audience chamber where she was.

He was often in such pain that every movement made him suffer but in spite of this he was always agreeable and always faithful to the great devotions of the Church that should also be ours. To his love of prayer and the Office I must add the one which was paramount, his love for the Blessed Sacrament. He spent part of his nights in prayer whenever possible, before the Blessed Sacrament in his oratory. When he was exiled to Gaete, it was he who carried the Blessed Sacrament. It was his first and most tender devotion and the center of his homage. When he said Mass he appeared completely absorbed and if another celebrated Mass in his presence he showed profound respect. He followed all the movements of the faithful but his gaze was always fixed on the tabernacle and the altar where Jesus was present.

Is it not a fact, sisters, that these three devotions, prayer, the Office and the Blessed Sacrament are those of a Religious of the Assumption?

I would like to mention his relations with people. His words always led heavenwards, his conversation pleased and charmed and he always spoke words of faith to uplift and do good. "The waters of nature flow earthwards and it needs machinery to raise them." It is the same for us, as our thoughts, feelings and words readily consider earthly matters. On the contrary, those of Pius IX by grace, had the power to raise the heart. Open any of his allocutions and you will find them full of ideas of truth, faith and thoughts of salvation.

Here is a great lesson that the religious of the Assumption could learn from Pius IX. If through prayer, grace and your retreats, each one of you could be sure that your conversations always led to God and raised up the minds of people to Him, what good you would do around you!

I do not ask you to preach. Not at all! Someone who is always preaching is tedious and wearisome to others. But if your heart is filled with love for God, ordinary words will appear full of grace and raise hearts. If there is a grace to seek and ask for it is surely this one.

What I mentioned in the beginning, love of truth, love of the Church and love for souls are the foundation of this grace. The tone of our words reveals its presence.

The words of Pius IX have three other characteristics. I suggest you imitate them. They are goodness, frankness and joy. The Holy Father always showed sincere goodness. One night when his legs were giving him much pain, he had to wait a long time for the ointment his chamberlain sought to alleviate them. The Pope merely said, "Mr. Charles takes his time!" He never complained whatever his sufferings but accepted all with goodness and in a joyous spirit. He was by nature, quick to retort, firm in his frankness for he was always truthful. He never said anything he did not think, even to soften some truth. His frankness lay in his heart as well as on his lips.

This is how I remember Pius IX and how I like to describe him to you today. Although he held a high position among men, we can learn many lessons from him. Each day, we will discover more about him, hidden characteristics of his goodness, generously and probably of his austerity.

Meanwhile, as we pray for him as is our duty, let us ask that we may receive the virtues that made him so holy. We were born, as it were, during his pontificate. He was not yet Pope in 1839 but it was during his reign that our work developed and was approved. We would like his spirit to mark the Congregation so that we will always be recognized as members of an Institute to which he granted approbation, and thus raised it to an adult and perfect state.

24 February 1878

I. ADORATION OF THE RIGHTS OF GOD THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S PLACE IN THE ASSUMPTION

In trying to decide what should be considered as the hallmark of our Institute. I became convinced that in everything and in every way, we ought to adore and be zealous for the rights of God.

This is something so great and solemn, that in order to avoid giving you the impression for even one instant that this majesty is