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Of the Supernatural Spirit

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

One of our confessors was telling me recently that he was afraid some of us did not have in mind enough supernatural viewpoints in our actions and words. I would be distressed if this observation was true for what is proper to the spirit of the Assumption is the supernatural view and aim in all things and the expression of the supernatural in all the words, actions, and works of our life.

I have decided to speak to you about this because it is important that each of us examine herself on this matter and ask herself: “When an event touches me, when something is decided for me, when it is a matter of being here or there, of being given a task, of having to undertake a certain study, in all things that affect my life, do supernatural thoughts and principles come first to my mind?” are these the object of your desires and of your search? Do you overcome the movements and thoughts of nature which should come only in the second place? One must act thus to be a daughter of the Assumption.

In the beginning, we used to put at the head of our letters: *Assumpta est Maria*. It was not only to rejoice with the Blessed Virgin, but to remind ourselves also that we have to uplift ourselves above the things of the earth.

The Fathers of the Assumption have adopted a petition of the Our Father as their motto: *Adveniat regnum tuum*. But in the Our Father, we do not separate the petitions; we say with the Church: “Hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Here are three great, primary things to be asked for, entirely supernatural. We ask for our sanctification and that of others, the salvation of souls. It is for this we work; that the kingdom of God come; that Jesus Christ may reign in us and in our children; that through our children and through the influence that we can have on their families, His kingdom may spread in society. This is our first preoccupation in education: to make Jesus Christ reign.

For this purpose, it is necessary to develop the intelligence of our children. If a Sister said: “I will put my hands in my sleeves and say a decade of the rosary so that Our Lord may reign in the school; I know neither mathematics, nor French, nor geography; I do not prepare my lessons, but I have the best of intentions; I entrust myself to the holy angels; I pray, and everything will go very well;” such a Sister is grossly mistaken. She should not act thus. These children are placed in our care to be instructed.

And even if their parents closed their eyes to this fact, if you want these girls to become women who would contribute to the advancement of the kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the world, they must learn how to write a letter or to make a budget. They should have a knowledge of history, geography, literature which would permit them to carry on in family life a conversation that would not be dull nor inferior, but a conversation which can uplift, which can touch on serious subjects, and help form the intelligence of their husbands and children so that they can make Christian judgments on all questions. A woman who is not educated has as subject of her conversation what her cook bought for dinner, and the other little happenings of domestic life. That is what a gentleman I know called the other day, a very insipid conversation.

If you were satisfied with saying, “Lord, may your kingdom come;” and you said to yourself: “I have supernatural intentions, that is enough; I do not have to trouble myself,” you would have women incapable of forming Christian families, women incapable of having in society the influence which belongs to them. You are then obliged to work to accomplish these two first petitions: “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come.”

I come to the third prayer: “Thy will be done.” We must do what our Congregation asks of us and do it with great zeal; but we must do the task not for personal ends nor have self in view. I will enumerate some examples: “This work pleases me...I need activity...I love the children of such an age, but not of that age-group. I would probably succeed, but that bores me...” Or else: “We must shine...We must succeed...They must sing our praises...” You understand that tis is inferior¹. Even if you gave the same care, the same devotedness, the same work as another religious acting for God only, your motives would be altogether inferior. Here then, the action can either be supernatural, or inferior and not worthy of the dignity of a daughter of the Assumption.

Certainly Jesus Christ added: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Our daily bread is a little thing but it is nevertheless absolutely necessary. It would not be reasonable nor consistent with the spirit of the Gospel if the Sister in charge of buying the daily bread threw herself into mystical or learned considerations, if she were absorbed in Corneille or Racine when it was necessary to order the vegetables or to provide for dinner.

The Gospels and the words of Our Lord are eminently reasonable. We must ask for this bread, take good care to obtain it; but it is a secondary concern and what is second comes after what is first: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things will be given to you as well.”² Whatever your task may be, it should not be the principal concern, the dominant desire, the thought to which a good part of the strength of your mind is spent; but neither should there be negligences, prodigality, or laziness. There should be that order and thrift which was found in the holy house of Nazareth.

¹ “Inferior” :word used by Mother Marie Eugenie

² Mt.6 :33

The Blessed Virgin had to procure the daily bread for Our Lord and St. Joseph. Our Lord could have done without it; but in His merciful condescendence He willed to be nourished like us by daily bread. He deigned to seem to be tired when this daily bread was delayed. He was seated on the side of Jacob's well, weary from the walk, exhausted from hunger and thirst but certainly more exhausted still by His efforts to reach this people for whom He was waiting, by the great desire to give them the water which would spring forth to eternal life, which He had come to bring them.

This was for Him the real weariness. Yet He deigned to show Himself subject to our earthly toil. And when on the cross He said: "I thirst"³, undoubtedly, He thirsted for the salvation of souls, for the accomplishment of the will of God; but there also was the natural thirst which His extreme sufferings caused.

But coming back to the application we can make to pattern our life on that of Nazareth: the Blessed virgin attended to the clothing, bread, drink, and common, ordinary food for St. Joseph and for Our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Joseph worked, and from the earnings of this work, she supplied the needs of the Holy Family – with what care, what thrift, what order, what foresight!

One could say providence, for providence is the act by which God provides for all things. Providence for a mother of a family means her providing for all things as far as she can. The Blessed Virgin sought to keep the household expenses within the limits of her budget. This care is a duty in religion, we must imitate her; but you must remember that the Blessed Virgin always kept her soul above these things and sought above all the kingdom of God and His justice.

Ask yourself if in the Holy Family anyone had selfish motives. It would be a blasphemy to say that of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He never sought to please Himself; He did not look for His personal satisfaction in any human things. The virtue of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph was such that they did not seek themselves: perfect imitators of Jesus Christ, they went about their ordinary life in the same spirit as He.

It is not said that Our Lord ate less than the others. On the contrary, it is said that He ate with sinners⁴. The Pharisees said that He enjoyed a good meal. They dared to say that of Jesus Christ! But the good meal of Nazareth was nothing marvellous: when there was at table some bread, some wine, perhaps a little butter and honey, (that was the food of the country), Our Lord partook of all these as the others did. He did not live as St. John the Baptist; and St. Francis de Sales says in this regard that Our Lord was the model for all, while John the Baptist was the model of a small number of souls called by God to lead a penitential life, abstaining in an extraordinary way from food.

We are called to live the common way. It is said that the Blessed Virgin fasted often in the temple, but in Nazareth, she did, undoubtedly, as Our Lord and St. Joseph did. Our Lord did at Nazareth what He did in Judea – that which He told the Apostles to do, "Eat what is set before you"⁵. It is the general rule for religious communities.

Examine, Sisters, if in the different things we have spoken about and in many other things which will come to your mind, you seek always and above all the kingdom of God and His

³ Jn 19 :28

⁴ Mt. 9 :11

⁵ Lk 10:8

justice. Have supernatural views - of holiness, of the glorification of the name of God, the spread of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the accomplishment of the divine will. Discard personal considerations. These make us descend from supernatural views, even under the cover of high-sounding pretexts such as: "I could do good to people, and I am not given that kind of work..."

You are well acquainted with the life of St. Anthony of Padua, this "hammer of heresies," this famous preacher whose word resounded throughout all Italy, Spain, and France; where did he not preach? Even the fishes came out of the water to hear him. After the famous "chapter of the mats," he was assigned to a poor house on the mountain where he was thought good for nothing. He swept floors, fulfilled lowly tasks; he was the most humble, the most hidden of the Franciscan brothers. This condition would have lasted to the end of his life, he would never have asked to leave that state, he would have persisted in the meanest occupations, if God had not used a providential circumstance to show to the well-intended Superior that he had a treasure of which he was not aware.

I have already told you this story. The Franciscans came to the town for an ordination and received hospitality at the Dominicans. Now, in those days, the Franciscans were not good preachers, while the Dominicans were excellent ones. During the meal, the Prior of the Dominicans asked the Superior of the Franciscans to have one of them preach. This good Father told himself: "I preach very poorly, the priests with me don't preach well either; if I ask this brother whom no one knows, our poor little reputation would not be endangered." So he said to St. Anthony, "Brother, you are to give the allocution." Anthony rose, spoke with such eloquence that all were held spellbound by his words and they recognised in him the great preacher who would still three kingdoms.

Apply this to yourselves, Sisters. In your tasks, you are sometimes tempted to say, "I do little...of what use is it?...i could do much more...What, always the same thing for ten, fifteen, twenty years?... There are others who teach catechism; it is so beautiful; it gives one a chance to speak of God..." It is not the good angel who speaks here, but the bad angel.

In temptation, we must answer thus: "Is it through a personal motive that I act? Do I look for the glorification of the name of God either through myself or through another (unless it is a question of my own sanctification)? But aside from this, provided that good is wrought among us, whether I be the instrument or not, does it matter?"

Look at Our Lord. He stayed thirty years in Nazareth making yokes of ploughs, repairing broken wheels. There is a yoke still preserved which is said to have been made by St. Joseph; it is probable that Our Lord helped to make this coarse piece of work.

One can speak indefinitely on this subject, but meditate on it yourselves, Sisters, and find out where or in which things your thoughts are below the supernatural. Ask this spirit of faith from Our Lord who would want to make you more supernatural each day because such a spirit forms the essential depth of a spouse of Jesus Christ and a religious of the Assumption.