

This is what I am asking you in speaking of exterior modesty. During your prayers and when you examine your conscience often ask yourselves how you have regulated your exterior conduct. Examine your looks, words and thoughts, and try to acquire that interior recollection, that silencing of the passions and purity of soul which make exterior modesty so easy.

On behaving as a Religious

20th January 1873

My dear daughters,

The words which you have just heard from the Rule¹ besides containing an important recommendation, indicate the necessity of continuous self-discipline if we want to acquire true gentleness of manner.

You must have noticed those, who while retaining a certain freedom of manner are nonetheless always mistress of themselves. All in them is modest, simple and straightforward. Others, on the contrary, perhaps more reserved and stiff do not possess this exterior modesty.

The recommendation I am making now concerns each one of you. Few of you have acquired that modesty and gentleness of manner by which you avoid noise and excessive laughter and are recognised for what you are – a Religious. It is true that a Religious is known by her habit and veil. But if for any reason she had to discard them would she still be recognised as a Religious?

I have met Religious in secular costume who preferred to dress thus in order to do more good in the world. Religious who were neither prim nor reserved, who did not go around with their hands piously clasped, and were not stiff or afraid to smile at an amusing remark made

¹ Of Simplicity, Modesty and Mutual Relations

during a sermon. No, the modesty of which I am speaking, although it does not regulate every movement gives an impression, always and everywhere of gentleness, peace and simplicity and indicates a person who is trying to become holy.

Ask yourselves the following question, Sisters: "If tomorrow I had to put on some kind of secular dress, a black dress for example, and a bonnet, would I still be recognised as a Religious? Are my actions always marked by gentleness, and are all my movements quiet and peaceful? Do my words annoy others and do I show signs of annoyance when I am vexed? By your answers to these questions you will know whether you are truly Religious. I beg of you to make this examination frequently.

If at the Assumption we are allowed greater freedom in our movements, and if there are no particular rules governing them, it is because all our exterior bearing should be the result of our interior modesty.

In some Congregations, from the first day of their entrance Religious are trained as in a regiment. "You must not raise your eyes so far as to see further than 10 steps before you. You must hold your head in this manner, and not in that, and you must place your hands just so." These things are good and I am not belittling them, and I think that exterior modesty is thus acquired more speedily, but in a less meritorious way. In other Orders such as the Benedictines for example, the exterior is ruled by the

interior, and modesty is acquired by separation from the world, and by recollection and by the interior life.

For you also, modesty must be founded on recollection, prayer and the Presence of God; it must come from within and from your imitation of Our Lord and Our Lady. It is said somewhere in the Rule that the Sisters should never allow anything to appear in their words or movements that could disedify others. Compare what is asked for here with your own exterior deportment and see if you find in yourself anything rough, jarring or noisy, or anything unseemly which would never have been found in Our Lady. But I do not wish you to think that Our Lady always held herself in such and such a way, or that she turned her head exactly so; no, but with a soul so filled with Divinity as was hers, her body was subject to God in all things, and as it was not ruled by any passion, purity robed it with exquisite modesty.

Here let us understand one another clearly. By passions, I mean impatience, vanity, pride, laziness, susceptibility, hurry and negligence and also carelessness; all those imperfect dispositions inclining us to imperfection and to that which is not holy – moodiness, self-occupation, and all those other inclinations you know of which disturb the exterior of those consecrated to God. On the contrary, purity of heart, the death of self and the practice of the Presence of God will not allow of the existence of any one of these imperfect dispositions, but will establish in their place something gentle, harmonious, good and recollected, something which speaks of God.

