



*23 February 1879*

## On Charity

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

My dear Daughters,

A few days ago I was saying at recreation that I should think a religious lucky if she did not need to be always coming back to the first elements of Religious Life. But, seriously, I would not consider her so lucky, because if she really thought she had no need to come back to humility, to patience, to obedience and poverty and charity, she would be suffering from illusions. There is so much work to be done to reach the perfection of these virtues, and they are the foundation and the essence of Religious Life. There is a whole life's work in that, and one has to keep on at it without respite, first on one point and then on another.

Charity is what St. Paul recommends in today's Epistle. You know, charity has always been considered the pith of St. Augustine's Rule. The rule begins with it, and every page, every word, is alive with it. There are Rules whose spirit can be said to be a spirit of silence, or of poverty or of austerity. But in St. Augustine's Rule charity is the life of everything.

You know, Sisters, that every Christian is absolutely bound to love God more than himself and above all things. This is a basic fact. Often examine yourself to see if you really have this love of preference for God. It is a necessity, because without it the soul is not established in charity, and St. Paul says that without charity one is not God's child or God's friend.

In the order of perfection, this charity can grow and be developed immeasurably and can be enriched day after day. A thing that touched me deeply in Sister Marie Catherine's<sup>1</sup> last moments was that she had only one preoccupation, namely to gain by suffering and charity all the degrees of love that she might have acquired during her life.

Each of us has a certain degree of love of God to acquire and that is what should be our great preoccupation. God has prepared for each one of us a degree, a fullness of love, that ought to be our glory in Heaven and our joy here below. We must see, then, that we really do make progress in love every day. Love is an ingredient of all the virtues; it is their starting-point and their goal, so our great preoccupation must be to make progress in the love of God, and also in the love of our neighbour, which follows immediately in God's commandment.

St. John says: "He who does not love his brother whom he sees how can he love God whom he

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Saint-Martin

does not see?”<sup>2</sup> For God’s sake then, we have to love our neighbour, all our neighbours, putting up with them, being kind to them, for this reason, that each one is the image and likeness of God. If we reserved our charity for those only who please us, you know what Our Lord says in the Gospel: “Do not even the tax collectors do as much?”<sup>3</sup>. They are nice and friendly to people they like, they show tenderness to those they love. But the mark of a Christian is charity towards all. And the progress in this charity must be always noticeable and always increasing.

Our Lord said: “The mark by which all men will know you for my disciples will be the love you bear one another”<sup>4</sup>. Love one another then, first in community and then in the whole Church. Faith shows us Our Lord in every Christian, and it is for His sake that we must love all our fellow Christians. Love tends to become devotedness and that makes us prefer the good of another to our own, as the Rule says: ‘You can judge that you are more advanced in so far as you prefer the good of the community to your own’<sup>5</sup>.

The holy season of Lent will soon be here. It is the season for adoration, reparation, prayer. It is a time of expiation and also of preparation. Charity is what we must begin our Lent by, developing charity in our hearts, praying for sinners, praying for each other, asking for perfection for one another. Try to be ardent, first of all for God, and then, for His sake, ardent in loving each other. This love is practised chiefly towards the Church. In her we find all the members of Christ Our Lord, all the souls He loves. She must be the outstanding object of our charity. Practise this charity by prayer and sacrifice and mortification, and by self-forgetfulness. These are all things that will bear fruit, not only for your own advantage but for the good of others, when you have the intention of being useful to them.

I have something to add, Sisters. In your Particular Examen, in your meditation, in your efforts, I cannot insist too much on your always having some special virtue to work at. Father Surin says somewhere: “What do we mean by a person who is tending to perfection? We mean someone who always has a spiritual project on hand, a point of perfection to work at all the time, something good and holy to come back to and to concentrate on”. Such a one makes everything converge on her project, whether prayer or work or mortification, by the purpose she puts into her acts of virtue, and into her efforts to become like Our Lord and to fill her soul with His dispositions. There are so many chances of getting on with a piece of work that is always at hand, whether it is the work of embroidery or of perfection. This is very different from the lax and careless ways of one who works a little at this and a little at that and often at nothing at all; she may keep up a modicum of regular observance but she has not the ardour, the firmness, the courage of a soul who is intent on attaining a fixed goal by clearly defined exercises of perfection.

It is clear that if all your life you have something definite to work at all the time in your thoughts and actions, this will check other views and preoccupations and you will advance in perfection, because one by one the religious virtues will be developed in your soul. By working at one detail and then another you will grow progressively more like Our Lord. What I recommend specially today is that you aim at becoming like Him by charity which is such an outstanding feature of your Rule

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Jn 4:20

<sup>3</sup> Mt 5 :46

<sup>4</sup> Jn 13 :35

<sup>5</sup> Rule of St. Augustine