



December 21st 1879

On humility
Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

Dear daughters,

In our desire to receive as many graces as possible for Christmas, I would like to remind you that, of all the dispositions, the one that most attracts God to the soul is humility. We have a very beautiful Rule on humility in our Order; but in addition to the Rule, I feel I should say something to you, reminding you that humility is the sister of submission and also the sister of charity.

St Paul tells us today that it doesn't matter if we are judged by the world¹. It is not the judgements of the world that measure who we truly are. Being esteemed or despised by the world is of little consequence: God is our judge. At every moment, God looks into the depths of our souls. He sees there a certain degree of virtue, a certain imperfection, a certain disposition towards humility, self-will, generosity, and finally, certain dispositions that may make us pleasing or displeasing to him. During a retreat – we will make one during the three days before Christmas – we must place ourselves under God's gaze and try to see ourselves in this inner light.

Few of you, given that we are living in a state where one would naturally expect to find certain virtues, have said to themselves: 'How is it that such and such a person does not possess such and such a virtue?' 'We are surprised to find personality² in one, and the need to talk about oneself in another. For my part, I confess that I was surprised to meet a person committed to the church who only knew how to speak in terms of 'I' and 'me'.

This is because many people – who, incidentally, want to serve God and manage to sanctify themselves because, in the course of their lives, God sends them trials, contradictions and humiliations – do not immediately see in themselves a certain fault, a certain particular flaw that often affects others. From this point of view, being judged by the world is of little importance; but benefiting from the judgements of the world matters a lot because, in these judgements, there is always a grain of truth that helps us to better know ourselves. That is why we should not be irritated by them, but rather look within ourselves and say: "No doubt I do not know myself. What in me stops the light of God? What is the source of my imperfection? What does the pure light of our Lord find in me that impedes its spreading?"

You know, sisters, that God dwells in our souls. He dwells there in many ways. First, through his being, and he awaits our adoration. Then through his grace. Not only did God create us, but he gives us grace, which makes us his friends. Our Lord is within us, not through his tangible presence, except at the moment of communion, but through his grace and his spirit. He is like the soul of our soul, he lives within us and communicates his Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit dwells within us as in his temples. *You are a temple of God.*³

Why are we not easily collected? What prevents us from entering within ourselves to receive the light of the Holy Trinity that dwells in the depths of our soul? Our sins and imperfections are the veils we place over

¹ Cf. 1 Cor 4:3.

² 'Personality': a word used in a pejorative sense in the 19th century.

³ 1 Cor 3:16-17.

this sun, closing us in on ourselves instead of allowing ourselves to be penetrated by the spirit of Jesus Christ.

God is in the depths of our soul, according to Bossuet's expression, like a sun shining through crystal. If you expose a crystal globe to the rays of the sun, they penetrate it. But if, instead of a crystal globe, you take an opaque globe or cover it with veils, the sun is not reflected in it. Unfortunately, this is the case for our soul. That's why it's said so often in the Holy Scriptures: *Sinners, reflect on this in your hearts*⁴. Come and listen to Him who speaks there, worship Him who dwells there.

You all know the chapter from the Imitation of Christ about the kingdom of God within us. That is where we must enter so that the light may enlighten us. One of the first things it must enlighten for us is the knowledge of God and of ourselves. *May I know you, O my God, and may I know myself!*⁵ said Saint Augustine. *May I know you so that I may love you, may I know myself so that I may despise myself!* May I finally become that humble, lowly creature, despising myself, knowing my imperfection, my weakness, my misery, presenting myself thus before God, seeking him through faith, adoration and love within my soul, listening to his teachings, remaining faithful to them and seeking for his rays to illuminate my whole heart.

When the light of grace has thus taken possession of our whole being, it ends up shining before people, because it is spread within us and we become souls of light. It is in this sense that it is said in the Gospel: *While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light*.⁶ And again: Let your light shine before people⁷. Not ourselves, but Jesus Christ in us, but the divine light in us, spreading and shining forth from us, because we are under his influence and under his action.

I heard someone say the other day that our reputation is our most precious possession, and I found that terribly human. That may be so in the world. For us, as religious, what should be most precious to us is the glory and honour of God, the extension of his kingdom in souls. As for us, our religious life should be the most important, and all that makes us more perfect in this religious state because it is what establishes us in a state of perfect charity towards God.

If we depend, within us, on God's grace, if we remain in perfect charity, we will become women of light, and we will end up being transparent to the grace and light of Jesus Christ. It is then that the resemblance to Jesus Christ will be established, and that these words of the Gospel will be fulfilled, because our Lord, who has come down into our hearts, lives there and is free to radiate his light, his warmth and his grace.

This is what we must seek in a retreat, especially at Christmas time, a time of great renewal, because our Lord comes as if anew to live in us. He comes to fill us with his power, to grant us his graces and to become our Saviour, our father, our master, our friend, our spouse. Let us therefore prepare ourselves with great care for this beautiful feast, and above all through humility and dependence on Jesus Christ.

⁴ *Redite praevaricatores ad cor*. Is 46:8.

⁵ *Soliloquies*, Book II.

⁶ Jn 12:36.

⁷ Mt 5:16.