

On perfect Self-surrender

22nd December 1872

My dear Daughters,

Last time I spoke to you about the spirit of adoration which I wanted you to establish yourselves in, having Jesus Christ always before your eyes, because He came on earth as He told the Samaritan woman - in order to find those who would adore His Father in spirit and in truth.

Today I would like to underline the spirit of self-surrender which is, the fruit of adoration. This is the state in which Our Lord shows Himself to us in the manger. There, more than anywhere else, He is completely surrendered. He is totally at the disposal of men and of His Father. Surrendered in obedience, He is defenceless Himself; He desires neither earthly security nor wealth in which men place their trust. He has no one to defend Him: He asks for nothing; He is perfectly obedient. In the manger, Our Lord is weakness itself. You may take Him in your arms, you may do what you like with Him. Our Lord submits to everything because He is entirely surrendered and given to His Father's will.

You know Sisters, that this surrender is part of adoration. By it we acknowledge God's sovereign right over us; we acknowledge His infinite wisdom, and His right to do with us as He pleases, and we realize that there is nothing better than to surrender to His Divine Will. In this surrender

by which we give ourselves entirely to our Heavenly Father, there is also a great act of love, because we come to realize that anything we take back in the gift of self to God is our greatest misfortune. The Saints aspired to this total surrender all their lives. They surrendered themselves without reserve to Divine Providence that it might guide them as freely as it guides the birds of the air.

In this surrender lies the meaning of the three Vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity, and of the life we lead, abandoning ourselves as we do to all God's desires and to all He has prepared for us. When you entered Religion, Sisters, you did not choose those with whom you were to love; you found an already existing condition of things and you accepted it. In it some things please you, and others do not. In it you find people you either like or dislike. If you listen to your own natural inclination, if you still hold to them and to your own ideas, you will never attain the real purpose of Religious life.

You came to Religion to surrender yourself to God in a very special way so that He might work in you continually, and in order that God, who is infinitely wiser than you, might guide you. Perhaps you saw the perfection of your vocation in one aspect and God saw it in another. You thought you would do a lot and God has made you a nonentity; you hoped to be raised to contemplation, and God has given you no light, no consolation. When you were in the world you thought yourself devout; you thought that you could easily spend fifteen hours before the Blessed Sacrament; instead

in Religion, you find only work, hardship, dryness and even darkness in prayer. So much for the interior. And for the exterior? You thought you had this or that aptitude, that you would be with this or that person; instead, you meet people with quite different orientations from your own, characters who are not your type.

There is no age when one is free from these feelings; no age when the movements of God does not reveal itself as totally different to our own idea of holiness. So you must aim at complete surrender in all that concerns your soul, your health and obedience. Our Lord shows Himself to us devoid of self-will and without any resistance, and in the same way, the perfectly obedient soul places no obstacles of self-will in the way of what is asked of her. Whether she finds herself in Egypt or Jerusalem, or in the Holy of Holies, she is equally content because she is only desirous of one thing: - the Will of God.

I was anxious to show you how Our Lord established Himself in this total abandonment by Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. By faith you recognize God's rights over you. You prefer the circumstances in which you find yourself to all others because they come to you from God.

It is told of the Blessed Henry Suzo that he would have preferred to be a grain of sand for all eternity - had God so willed, rather than a Seraph through his own choice. And when someone had pity on another saint because of his condition the saint answered, "My condition! I could never

wish for a better one. Even if I searched everywhere and I were offered the contemplation of a St. Teresa, or the love of a Seraphim, I should still wish for no other condition than that willed for me by God. The only important thing for me to do is to practice the virtue God desires of me. I love my present state; better still, I love it because God has chosen it for me.

An act such as this is very pleasing to God. It is thus, as I told you last time, we accept all the shortcomings we find in ourselves. We accept our imperfections, struggles, combats, all that is lacking in the natural order, in the order of grace or of intelligence; we love also all those with whom we have to live.

When a watchmaker makes a watch he not only makes the main spring but all the others, so that they may all move in harmony. In the same way God has chosen those with whom we are to live. We must receive them all from His hand, respect them all, draw profit from all the opportunities they give us, and see them all in the light of complete surrender to Providence.

Let us enter into the sentiments of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, and say as she did, "What is going to happen to me today, O my God? I simply do not know. All that I know is nothing will happen that you have not arranged, planned and ordained from all eternity. That is sufficient for me, O my God, that is sufficient. I adore your eternal and impenetrable designs. For love of You I accept them with all

my heart; I make of them a sacrifice and I unite this sacrifice to that of my Saviour, Jesus Christ. I ask of you in His name and by His infinite merits, to give me patience in my sufferings and perfect submission to your Divine Providence."

May it be so with you Sisters, in every trouble or suffering, whether it comes from your family, your position, from that which you lack, or from those around you. You see now how this surrender becomes a great act of faith; a supreme act of faith in God who created all things, who guides all and sustains all - the blade of grass as the world - and who has only one end in view - the sanctification of His chosen ones.

There is also a great act of hope in self-surrender - Hope placed in God alone. Here is the sure way of encountering Him. Masters of the spiritual life speak of the necessity of detachment even from the means that lead us to God. They tell us how essential it is that we should give up everything in order to find our rest in God alone. What is a Confessor? What is a Novice Mistress? What is a Superior? They are all means to an end. We speak of a facility in prayer, of consolations, of lively feelings of love for God. What are all these things? They are means to an end.

Holy Communion itself, if we speak thus, is still a means. Our Lord gives Himself to us to be our strongest help. But He is also our end; we do not have to detach ourselves from Him, but in the degree in which it is given us

to approach Him, we ought to seek Him above all consolations and above all the joys He brings. We should say with Blessed Margaret Mary of the Blessed Sacrament: "When I cannot find our Lord in His Sacrament, I can always find Him on the Cross." So remember, Sisters, Our Lord is our end; we must tend towards union with Him, and yet be detached from the consolations this brings.

As for other things, you should be prepared to see them all change; to see God at work in your soul with different strokes. St. John of the Cross compares the soul to a block of marble that is chiselled by different people whom Our Lord use for the work; one cuts away the bigger pieces, another gives the finishing touches. It is greatly to the benefit of the soul, and even necessary that the same hand should not mould her all the time, in order to achieve the perfection of the work which is nothing less than the image of Jesus Christ.

You know how our Lord accomplished His work in St. John of the Cross. Some members of his Order turned against Him. They went so far as to throw him into prison where he died, after having suffered contempt and scorn, and having been tried by sickness. It was no longer in his conversations with St. Teresa in the monastery which he had founded and loved, but in prison, despised, rejected and condemned that the work of Christ Our Lord was made perfect through him. None of us know how Our Lord intends to complete His image in our souls, but by Faith we must tend towards this end, abandoning ourselves to His work in

us. This is the condition of perfect surrender, and it involves a great act of hope, for by it we place all our trust in God rather than in the things of this world. When we wish to place our hope in some well established spiritual good or virtue, it often pleases Our Lord to upset all our plans. This has happened to me, and I have found myself wanting in obedience just when I thought myself to be the most obedient. This happens to all souls with the exception of the most holy.

We must therefore place our hope in God's goodness, and in order to advance more and more, we must place our hands in the pierced hands of Our Lord, asking Him to lead us, awaiting all things from Him, and still hoping in Him even if they should lead us to death.

As for ourselves, we see our misery, our inclination to evil, our inability to do anything by ourselves. Let us therefore, trust in God with a hope surpassing all hope, at rest only on the infinite fidelity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God would not be God if He did not repay the trust of a soul completely abandoned to Him.

And what about the love in self-surrender? It shines out from beginning to end. We cannot have such hope without a very great love. "I love you, I value all you are, I rejoice in your perfections and in your strength. In them I place all my faith, all my trust; I detach myself from everything internal and external in order to see you alone, and to have no hope but in you."

There, Sisters, is immense love, what St. Jeanne de Chantal called "the prayer of self-surrender or the prayer which consists in putting oneself in God's hands." It is the soul saying a perpetual *yes* and placing herself at the Lord's feet, desiring all He desires, loving all He loves. In this prayer there is hardly any light, very few considerations and very few things that are clear. There is even little joy except the joy of union. But there is a soul who unceasingly and from moment to moment places herself in God's hands. She is completely abandoned to God's will in a perpetual *yes*.

In the Gospels she hears, "I am the Vine, and you are the branches."¹, and she clings more closely than ever to the stem. She reads too: "Without Me you can do nothing"². She knows that this is indeed true, and she expects all from God's hands. St. Francis of Sales says that such a soul resembles St. John at the Last Supper. The other apostles were eating the various dishes served at table; he, while having taken the food ordained by the Law, contented himself in resting on the breast of Jesus.

I once knew someone who said, "My life's work has been to remove all the obstacles between my soul and God, two realities that want to be united. If I want to tie my hands as one I suppose I will not leave anything between them, not

¹ Jn 15:5

² Jn 15:5

even a piece of paper.” It is the same as regards God and the soul. Everything must go. Only faith, hope and charity can remain on the one side; God on the other. When I say that everything must go, you know well Sisters that everything remains with Charity, because through it we give ourselves to our neighbour in Jesus Christ.

A soul thus united to God is full of love drawn from the heart of Jesus Christ. She keeps nothing for herself. Her intellect, her heart, her will - all these, she casts into the heart of God, expecting everything from Him alone. She gives all to God. She lives by faith, hope and charity. This is perfect surrender, perfect prayer of simplicity in which God does everything, and in which the soul clings forever to God.

After having explained all this to you as best as I can, I must tell you Sisters that this is not the work of a day. At first sight it appears to be easy, but you must strive always in order to attain it, through trial, consolations and difficulties. Pray earnestly to the Holy Child for this surrender; it is the final end of our Rule, the final aim of Religious life. I have often noticed with admiration beside the death-bed of a Sister, how jealous Our Lord is of that final act of surrender, how when she has no more self-will, as it were, He wishes her to be clothed in the nuptial garment of total surrender.

So work towards that my Daughters, hoping ardently to attain it, without persuading yourselves that you will immediately reach the summit of the mountain. First dig up

foundations in your soul through trials, sacrifices, desolations and the events of life.

Believe with an ardent faith that it is the Divine Vinedresser who is working at His vines, for He Himself has said: "My Father works even until now, and I work"³. What work is this? As you well know, it is not to produce wine, unless it be the vine that buds forth virgins. Jesus Christ is working unceasingly in those He wants for Himself. You must respect this work, adore it, hope that at long last you will be as He wants you to be, never allowing human attachments or sin to seep in, anything base or unworthy to entrap you. Do not put your security in anything earthly, nor hold on to it. Imperfection can come into a soul but it should never stay there.

Be faithful to the grace given to you, unite yourself to it, and be ready to say *Amen* to that which is asked of you. You will not do this without cost, but it will bear such great fruit for all eternity.

Love doing what costs you; love your vocation above all else, because it will certainly lead you to perfection if you are faithful. Love God, and everything that comes from God. Love each other with the ardent desire that you may all reach the perfection to which He invites you, and for which He has called you into Religion.

³ Jn 5:17