

On Positive Delicacy

23rd February 1873

My dear Daughters,

After having spoken about how all our life must be given to the love of our Lord, I talked to you last Sunday of the care that you must take to banish from your souls all that can stain, mar, all habits of sin or of imperfection, in a word, all that is opposed to the delicacy of love. But this negative delicacy does not suffice; one must add positive delicacy to it. What is this positive love? It consists in planting in ourselves all that could possibly please God, and make us like Our Lord. To reach this resemblance, there are different stages; one must begin by imitation; union follows next.

I say first of all *imitation*. In the Pontifical, on the day of the profession of Virgins, the Bishop addresses them with this word: "Come", and they answer "Yes, Lord, we will follow you with all our heart." Throughout His Gospel, Our Lord, says to those who follow Him: "Come, follow Me." We hear it said first of all to the young man whom He called to the perfect life; "Sell all your goods, leave all"; but immediately after He adds; "Come, follow me." For renunciation alone is not enough to prove one's love. It is not with the mouth alone - with the heart, with tenderness and with affection that one must love Our Lord; it is above all in imitating His works in leaving that we are in order to become what He is.

This is exactly what St. Benedict means when He says in his Rule that the religious life is a conversion of

lifestyle. The Religious must be changed into a new creature, transformed so as to resemble Our Lord. That is his whole life's work. On the one hand, remove all the stains, all that in our soul touches on sin; this is negative delicacy; on the other hand, we make an effort to enter into the dispositions, the prayers, the actions of Our Lord in order to reproduce His life in us: that is positive, affirmative delicacy and, I repeat it, the work of one's whole life.

But how does this transformation come about? First of all by imitation. Beginners do not yet have Our Lord within them, other than his presence in every soul in a state of grace. What matters is that they should have Him often before their eyes, that they look at Him as their model. This is done through meditation, which considers now one point from the life of Our Lord, now another: Jesus in the manger, the child Jesus, Jesus at Nazareth, Jesus in exile or during his apostolic life, Jesus, finally, as He is in the Gospels, where his actions, his inclinations, his thoughts are shown us so that we can form ourselves on this model.

After having copied Him in one thing, we must copy Him in another: for in Him we find all virtues. Take for example humility: and see Jesus humble in the host, humble in His Crib, humble in His Infancy, humble in His hidden life, humble in His obedience, to creatures, humble above all in the mystery of His suffering on the Cross at Calvary. Humility will come to you in your striving to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, in resembling Him, at the same time it will also come from your efforts to realize this word that He tells us: "learn of Me for I am meek and humble of Heart."

I spoke of humility; but take poverty or meekness, it will be the same. The final reason for us for acquiring all the virtues, is to imitate Our Lord in whom we find all of them. That, my Daughters, must be the great occupation of those who are beginning to enter into the interior life.

For certain persons, they do nothing else but that for all their life, and they do very well if in all their actions and their occupations, in all their thoughts, in all their desires, they seek no other rule but the Gospel. With regards to death and to life, with regards to friends, to enemies, (this word may be a bit too strong, but I say it with regard to all that opposes us); if, with regards to contradictions and approbations, we try to take a point of view and sentiments which are more conformed to our Lord, I consider that a very great grace.

But for the souls more faithful in corresponding to this first grace, there comes a time when thoughts are simplified, when one no longer feels the need to do a work in a special manner, the need to acquire first one virtue, then another; where, I would say, one no longer takes things in details but where the souls applies itself simply to letting Our Lord live in it, where it forgets itself, effaces itself, and wants Jesus Christ alone to act in it. Our soul is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus wants to make it His domain. He has all the right to live in our souls, but for those who refuse Him this right, St. Paul has a terrible word: "those, he said, who have received Jesus Christ by grace, and deliver themselves to mortal sin, crucify Him anew in their hearts."

There is no point in addressing these words to you, Sisters; you are very far from that. But before crucifying

Jesus Christ, He was bound, and a good number of people bind Him in their souls where He lives. He wants to make acts of humility there, acts of poverty, of dependence. He wants to accomplish acts of virtue, even to an heroic degree. That should not surprise you because He is the Master and the Lord of all the virtues. But in a certain measure we bind Him; if He asks a sacrifice, a humiliation, we say: "But I do not like to be treated just any way...; But it irritates me to ask for such permission...; But I do not like to live in such dependence; I am too big..." And this "I" comes in this way between us and Jesus Christ, and prevents Him from living in our souls.

I know very well that we do not usually use such a language: but, when by lack of recollection, by lack of faith and fervour to let Jesus Christ live in us, it happens is that we do not imitate Him. Is it not true that one sees more of "ourselves" than Jesus Christ in us? That is a disorder; and we must insistently ask for this attention, this application that will deliver us from ourselves to Jesus so that He may live in us.

All that I have just said to you applies not only to the religious life, but also to the simple Christian life of which the religious life, as you well know, is but the perfection. It is to all Christians that St. Paul has said: "We must mortify our nature in order to let Jesus Christ live in our mortal flesh."

A holy priest once said to me that a Christian can be compared to a candle. The body is the wax, the soul is the wick, and the Holy Spirit is the light. If the simple Christian is told that he is another Christ, with how much greater reason can it be said of religious who are called to develop the

mystery of grace received first at Baptism, then in Communion.

Do not believe, then, that our Lord comes to us in Communion only to be the consolations of our souls, so that we can taste the pleasure of possessing Him within us. No, He comes so that you may bear fruit. "I have chosen you", He said in His discourse after Supper, "so that you may go and bear fruit." And this fruit that our Lord expects from us, is that we be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. That is the measure we must attain. "My Father," He said, "is the husbandman, He purifies and tends the vine. He cuts off the branches that do not bear fruit, and those that already bear fruit He cleanses, He prunes them so that they can bear more."

And all of this is the mystery of the Christian life, of the interior life, of that life that God wanted to give to man in communicating Himself to him by grace. Alas! many Christians in the world, reject grace and want to follow Jesus Christ only in a minimal way; that is why He has chosen souls for Himself, such as Religious, who follow Him closely, and develop His life in their souls as much as possible.

What an infidelity it would be then, if we did not give Him all the consolation, all the joy, the glory that He expects from us; and if we did not let Him speak through our life, live in our actions, our thoughts, our feelings, He who gives Himself so often to us through Communion; if we were not resolved to make all sacrifices, so that by the delicacy of our love, His life may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

I could go into much more detail; but everything is there, the force of all sacrifice, the force to arrive at perfection. The whole life of a Religious of the Assumption must be to apply herself to live from the life of Our Lord, to live from the Gospel, in such a manner that Our Lord may be everything for her. Why are you to be found in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, if not so that He whom you adore may live more and more in you? See if all the words of the Rule and the greater part of your obligations do not tend to this same end? What a sweet and happy obligation it is to put Jesus Christ in us!

It is true that for this sacrifices are necessary. But in sacrifice you will find complete joy because it unites you to our Lord, Beatitude Itself. what gave the martyrs joy in prison, in the midst of their tortures? The fervour of their love. For us, if we do not have joy, if our joy is not complete, it is because we do not have fervour of soul; because joy is proportionate to fervour and to the nearness of Him who is the joy of the soul.

This true joy is the hundredfold that Our Lord promised even in the midst of persecutions. This joy does not resemble worldly joys. It carries the soul high above these joys. My dear Daughters, we must often ask for this hundredfold. We must above all have great attention to remove from our soul all that can stain it, a great attention to imitate and to make Him, who is the object of our love live in us - Jesus Christ.

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