



16 February 1879

On Silence

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

Therefore, in order that the Sisters may find, according to the word of the Holy Spirit, their strength, their justice and their peace in silence, speaking is never allowed from Matins until after the community Mass, unless there is an urgent need.¹

My dear Daughters,

I would like precisely to recommend silence to you today, and the reading of the passage on it from our Constitutions reminds us of it. We must give it our special attention. We are easily lax in this regard. Even a community which has been observing silence strictly may fall off little by little, if some Sisters begin to talk a little here and a little there.

Remember, Sisters, that silence contributes greatly towards perfection. St. Francis de Sales without hesitation said that if silence and prayer were established in a lax community, he would offer himself readily to undertake the reform of that community.

But it is difficult even for communities that do not need reform, to observe silence well. For it is very natural to let go in this matter. This is how it happens: a Sister has an important thing to say, and among those who teach there is often need to speak to each other. But instead of asking permission to speak, Sisters do often presume it. One starts a conversation, then it is followed up elsewhere, and this is how a lot of “asides” or private conversations take place.

Still another point: formerly, Sisters were always faithful in asking permission to visit and talk with those who are sick in the infirmary. Today, even when a Sister is only slightly indisposed, the Sisters go to visit her, so much so that this remark is sometimes heard: “Sister so and so has not come to visit me,” as if it were necessary to visit the infirmary the minute there is a sick Sister in it. Even here silence must be observed, and the Superior’s permission be obtained before going to visit a sick Sister.

Then a Sister meets with some contradictions, some little troubles that upset her. She has been corrected; she has not been successful in some things; she has not acquitted herself well of a responsibility; she is blamed by some people outside, by some persons within. She should

¹ Constitution, Chapter on Silence

Speak of these only to God and to her Superior. I cite St. Francis de Sales again who is severe in this regard: “He who complains, sins.” And this is not even addressed to religious. We find this passage, I think, in his “Introduction to a Devout Life”. For this reason, it is recommended in our Rule, not to complain, but to make a sacrifice to God of all these little annoyances.

When a Sister feels troubled or upset over something, she may ask for help and enlightenment from her Superior; but it does not have to be right at the moment – Hic et nunc. It does not have to be right after the disturbing experience has happened. This is to be immortified or lacking in self control; she must wait until the Superior is free. It would be well to speak at this moment to God, telling Him: “My God, You sent me this little observation, this mortifying experience. I will try to accept it with humility and simplicity. For the present, I don’t see that I am at fault, where I have done badly. Perhaps, later, I will see my mistake.” After this she should try to remain in peace.

It is very much in order for a Sister to ask her Superior how she may handle a situation and accept what it brings her. It is not proper to air her troubles to another Sister nor to say: “I’m fed up with it all! This child does not want to obey me... People outside complain of my lessons, and yet I try to do my best,” these and many other little complaints. This is not in order – this is wanting in silence, in mortification and in the perfection which silence establishes in those who observe it.

You must never forget, my dear Sisters, that we have made a vow of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience, in order to acquire perfection. To tend to perfectin, according to our Rule is a sacred commitment which comes from the vows. But silence, humility, mortification are part of the Rule; practising them one arrives at perfection.

When a Sister feels strongly governed by natural inclinations, she must have recourse to the Rule, in a spirit of obedience, of mortification and of union with Our Lord.

We all desire to be united with Our Lord! Consider, how very rarely Our Lord spoke. How Our Lady spoke even more rarely! How few are the words attributed to her. Silence has always been the characteristic of all the saints. They spoke only for the service of God, to make Him known; they were motivated by zeal, never by a natural impulse; otherwise they would never have become saints.

These are but a few thoughts with which you may nourish yourselves in order to arrive at a firm resolution to be more strict in observing silence.

