

ON THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

18th October 1874

My dear Daughters,

Allow me to insist on a virtue which you all have and which is so much the foundation of any Christian life that it seems unnecessary to remind you of it, but which nevertheless must be firmly established and strengthened in our soul: faith.

When we lag in generosity, in sacrifice, it is through lack of faith. Then in life we find ourselves astonished at having to make efforts, having painful things to bear, this shows that our faith is weak, and that we do not raise up our thoughts enough to the eternal rewards faith reveals to us. St. Paul has says: “If the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, our faith is vain.” (1Cor.15: 17). And truly, without faith and hope in the Resurrection, without faith and hope in an eternal bliss all our life would be but anguish and our sufferings are useless.

Without any doubt, if we have embraced the part we have taken of following Jesus Christ in the religious life, it is by faith and for the faith. But we do live it with such a death to self that people recognize in our way of life the vivacity of our faith? Does it animate all our actions? Does it make every hardship, every trial bearable? And yet, we cannot say that our life is more difficult, more sacrificed than that of many people who live around us not unless we make it so. What will render our life one of greater sacrifice is the fact that we renounce ourselves more, that is to say: we shall have a greater spirit of sacrifice in obedience, in work, in mortification, in poverty, in our relations with God; for it is above all in prayer that we must have greater faith.

We must sometimes measure the strength and generosity of our faith by the generosity of our life, by the force with which we strip ourselves of all that is visible and aspire to the invisible: this is enough, Sisters, to reach great holiness. You have all known holy persons; but what was it which made you recognize holiness in them? Was it their virtues? No. Their amiability? Still no. It was the contact which you felt they had with eternity. One could say when speaking of such souls: “They are the spirit of prayer personified; the supernatural spirit personified; they already carry in them the traits of the other life, and their conversation is in heaven.”

Why, Sisters, can we not all be of those souls? You might tell me that you have your character, your defects, evil inclinations, bad dispositions; but we are all like that, and there has not been a saint without a defect; St. Aloysius Gonzaga had defects, St. Alphonsus de Liguori also; and this is very consoling for us. But what was flawless in them was the ardour of their faith, their spirit of prayer, the generosity of their soul in their relationship with God, their detachment and their rising up above all earthly things.

Behold what we must ask God for ceaselessly. <May the prayer you may oftenest have on your lips be: “I believe, Lord, but increase my faith.” (Mk.9: 23). It is the prayer that the unhappy father begging of the Saviour the healing of his son possessed by the devil said, knowing that his faith could obtain this miracle, “I believe, Lord, but increase the faith in me.” We must ask for such an ardent faith that it may make the world see what is unseen; we must become by prayer, by union with God, persons who bring to men the reality of the invisible, the supernatural and divine.

You must have seen some of those great figures of whom in spite of ourselves we exclaim: “What a person filled with the Spirit of God! How all in her leads to God! Well, Sisters, the ultimate

reason for our existence as religious is to be thus, to bring this spirit of faith in our contact with souls. We do not give to the persons we meet, we do not give to the children all we should give them, when we do not give them this spirit of faith.

And, Sisters, on this point we must understand clearly that there is no exception: The cook, the line-room Sister, the doorkeeper, the one who is sick as well as the one who is well, the one who teaches as well as the Superior, all without exception must bring to the world this revelation of the invisible world, this manifestation of a soul united to Jesus Christ from whom faith blazes forth.

Were we more convinced of this obligation we have towards souls, we would be unable to count the number of conversions obtained. If all who serve God, if all the priests, all the religious, men and women could bear in them this supernatural height, this vivid faith, this spirit of prayer, this personification of a life more eternal than temporal, I do not hesitate to say that the whole world would soon be Christian; there would be something in their personality which would act so powerfully on human societies that these souls would be the salt of the earth. In fact, this is what all the servants of God should be, since Our Lord told His Apostles: “You are the salt of the earth, and if the salt loses its savour, with what shall it be salted? (Mt.5: 13).

My dear Daughters, we cannot let this salt of the east lose its savour. But we must tend always with much force and energy to renew ourselves in so high a vocation. It is not a question of being content with little, with nothing, to say: “Here I talk, here I keep silent... Now I do this, later I do that...” but the great purpose of life for us must be union with God by spirit of faith, fervour in the practice of the virtues in union with Jesus Christ, the manifestation

of His Kingdom in us by our exterior conduct, in short by all our being.

Were you to do nothing but scrub the floor with spirit of faith, you would do much! Were you to do a lot of work without this spirit of faith, you would not do anything worthwhile.

Let your prayer often be to ask this faith, this spirit of faith which transforms, enlightens, animates all actions, which elevates to God most ordinary things. Ask it not only for yourself but for the Congregation; for among all the good things we can wish for our Congregation, there is nothing more necessary to ask than its sanctification. Ask them for us all a living faith, a pure faith.

Thank God our faith is pure, that is we believe all that the Church believes and teaches, we hold ourselves in submission to the Church as personified in the Pope in the most absolute manner; but between this pure faith and the living practical faith which vivifies, animates, renders itself visible in all our conduct, there are many degrees. We must work to ascend them. We must ask that the spirit of faith be visible in us all, and that, just as St. Paul said: "The just man lives by faith" (Rom. 1: 17). May it also be said of the Religious of the Assumption that they live by faith. This will be, my dear Daughters, the greatest tribute anyone could possibly pay us.
