

ON WORK

8th February 1884

My dear Daughters,

Now that I have had the Constitutions printed, it has been a great satisfaction to me to be able to give a copy of them to almost every one of you. I ask you to hunt up in these Constitutions the recommendations, and there are many, about diligence in work and the good use of time.

One might sometimes be inclined to consider only the interior life. Without any doubt, the first and best occupation is prayer. But since one cannot pray the whole time, outside the time in Chapel given to mental prayer, Office, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, carelessness at work is not the way to become a soul of prayer. All the holy women teachers of the Spiritual life emphasize this point. St. Jeanne de Chantal says that women of the world are often lax as regards work but for Nuns that is not right. An eye should be kept on them to see that they are hardworking, industrious and attentive to their work. St. Teresa held so much work, even for herself, that she says in one of her letters: "I cannot write much today on what I have been asked about, (an account of her prayer), because I have to spin; what I must do first of all, is to spin and to work for the house".

So one must not make attending to God an excuse for not working. Of course you do not work in the Chapel. Stay there as long as the Rule allows: I shall be glad of that. But at other times work, and spend your time well. That is recommended all through the Constitutions: in what concerns the reception of Novices, poverty, chastity, where severe use of time is spoken of, in the Chapters on

the Coadjutrix Sisters, on Recreation, in one word, you will find the recommendation to work usefully in almost every chapter. This habit gives our life the stamp of mortification, of generosity, of regular observance and of fervour.

We have had Sisters whose power of work was surprising. For example, the first Mother M. Catherine. Her health was unique. Amid sufferings that only ended with her death she did not waste a moment. As soon as she was able to, she gave herself to some useful work. Doubtless a bursar who does her accounts, and a mistress who prepares her lessons are employing their time. But if they have time over, they should sew, do needlework, etc.

I quoted St. Teresa and St. Jeanne de Chantal. St. Clare too held so much to working that when she was ill she had herself propped up so as to be able to work, in order that even in sickness she was not idle. She looked on that as an act of poverty. Certainly there will be serious illnesses when we shall not be allowed to work. But in the state of semi-invalid that comes to many Nuns I have always noticed that to take up some work, to force oneself to be industrious and active, gives strength of spirit, for prayer and mortification and for all the religious virtues.
