



27 January 1878

Our Lord's Hidden Life at Nazareth, Model of the Religious Life

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

During this entire period dedicated to the Infancy of Our Lord, we have meditated upon the mysteries of the Holy Childhood. It is a common practice to meditate on these mysteries until the Purification since this feast honours the 40th day when our Saviour was presented in the Temple. And yet, even as of now, the Gospels are no longer those of the Infancy. We have successively seen Our Lord in the midst of Doctors of the Law, then at the Wedding Feast in Cana.

I think this is a very favourable time to meditate on the hidden life of Our Lord at Nazareth. This life of obedience, silence, humility, poverty which covered the greater part of Our Lord's life is truly the model of religious life. With the exception of some orders of the strict observance that apply themselves to imitate Our Lord's life in the desert where He neither ate nor drank and where He lived in complete solitude, most of the religious orders are precisely consecrated to this life of which we read in the Gospel: "And the Child Jesus grew in age, in wisdom, and in grace before God and men"¹. Religious should grow in virtue, and it is at Nazareth that they will learn how to accomplish this daily work.

Alongside with manual labour to which Jesus deigned to submit Himself in obedience to the law imposed upon men in the earthly paradise, there was likewise for Him in a certain sense, a successive progress in all virtues. In the same measure that Jesus advanced in age, He deigned to further manifest the divine perfections in His Humanity. He followed a law, the law of childhood, and as He chose to make Himself small, silent, to suffer all the humiliations of this state, He manifested His virtues and perfections gradually. It is in this sense that one may say of Him: "...He grew in age, in wisdom, and in grace"².

For us, progress implies work. It is true that Our Lord dwells in us by grace, but His life ought to manifest itself further in us day after day. It is in this light that we should work. We learn how to go about this task at the feet of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It is there that great lessons are

¹ Lk 2:52

² Lk 2:52

learned: in this humble home where the Saviour of men and the Queen of Heaven were reduced to the greatest poverty, where they lived in a continual spirit of prayer, in silence and in sacrifice, in detachment from those very things which men seek, and in union with everything that was of heaven.

Before taking the mysteries of the Passion upon which one usually meditates during Lent, I ask you to meditate on the entire hidden life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, within which our life is enclosed, taking it from year to year, day by day, or even from one practice to another. Like Jesus at Nazareth, we should be self-effaced before men, poor and obedient; we should establish ourselves in prayer, in adoration, in perfect charity towards our neighbour, progressing daily like that Saint³ who made a vow to advance daily in virtue.

How admirable it would be to be able to make a similar vow. Yet, I would not want you to do so. I ask you, however, to take this resolution and to tell yourselves: "From now on until I die, I shall strive to make daily progress along the way of perfection."

This is not as difficult as it may appear to be at the outset. All of us have a number of imperfections. Every day, therefore, we ought to eliminate something of these imperfections so as to be able to tell ourselves at the end of the year: "I was impatient, impetuous, inattentive, I am a little less so. I bore contradictions badly; I did not like being humiliated; now, I have corrected this a bit." It is in this sense that one can make some progress every day.

This, however, is only the negative aspect of perfection; there is also a positive one. To every sin, there exists a corresponding virtue. It is not enough to simply get rid of imperfections; the opposite virtue should replace these. One should tell oneself often: "I ought to become more gentle, more humble, poorer, more patient; my obedience should grow in fidelity, in promptitude."

In the school of Our Lord Jesus Christ, at the feet of the Holy Family, defects as well as imperfections are excluded; everything that displeases God is banished from the home of Nazareth. The Blessed Virgin never gave in to the least venial sin. St. Joseph, who did not have the same privileges as Mary, may have unintentionally⁴ fallen, immediately rising nonetheless. In their school one can learn how to avoid every kind of fault and how to practise the most admirable virtues.

In a place that might have been twice or three times smaller than this parlour, Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived together, and in this they are our model of community life. Were two or three of you to live together in a room similarly small, there would certainly be quite a few virtues to practise.

Perfection in our rapports with one another is also another point on which progress should be made, following the example of the Holy Family. Such perfection had its source in continual prayer, humility, silence. There we have still another virtue about which we can learn from the Holy Family: silence. I do not mean that you should not talk at recreations; but you should ask Jesus, Mary and Joseph to teach you how to use words when it is time to talk, and how to keep silent at other moments of the day.

It would be an endless task were we to take one by one all the virtues that shone forth from the hidden life of Our Lord. I leave this for your meditation. But I think that knowing this home

³ Saint Andrew Avelino

⁴ "inadvertently": word used by Mother Marie Eugenie

of Nazareth, entering it often in heart and spirit, picturing to oneself what takes place there, is already to find a sanctuary where one seeks refuge in order to learn the lessons that the 30 years of Our Lord's hidden life can teach, while the lessons of His Public Life are contained in those 3 years, and those of His Passion in 24 hours. It is on His Hidden Life therefore, that I ask you to meditate from now on until Lent.

