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VII. PERFECT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST CONFORMITY AND ABANDONMENT TO THE WILL OF GOD

We do not become humble the day we begin to love Our Lord. It is a virtue that is difficult to acquire. Ever since the demon provoked malice in us at the time of the Fall, we are inclined by nature to be proud. We could even say that the less we have reason for pride, the prouder we are. The love of Our Lord must therefore give us the fidelity, generosity and constancy necessary to work each day of our life towards attaining humility or we will never achieve it. The love which should produce humility in us can only do so if we cooperate.

Another virtue which should grow in us through the love of Jesus Christ is conformity to the will of God. It is a fundamental virtue with the particular characteristic that it produces peace, freedom and detachment. It is one of the virtues that should radiate from a Religious of the Assumption. There is a very intimate connection between humility, love and conformity to the will of God. The teaching of St. Ignatius which is one of the surest on the interior life and the way of perfection, helps us to grasp this connection. He calls "degrees of humility" what could also be termed degrees of conformity to the will of God or degrees of love.

The first degree (which St. Ignatius calls a degree of humility), consists in being so disposed that nothing in this world would induce our will to turn to things which are not permitted by God. One would prefer to die rather than transgress the law of God. This disposition is so essential that it is necessary for salvation.

The second degree touches on that state in which each of us should be. Here, all things being equal, if no sin is involved in either choice, we are in such a state of indifference towards honor, glory, health, and well-being that our choice depends entirely on the will of God. If I am not mistaken, this is a degree of conformity to the will of God and a degree of love. If we love God very much then we have no other choice than that of God. We prefer what God prefers and want only what God wants.

From this comes the third degree of humility as given by St. Ignatius. In this state, the loving soul desires to be adorned with what is pleasing to Our Lord: humiliation, suffering and abjection. This third degree is heroic and goes beyond what is required of a religious of an absolute manner. Here, again, all things being equal, the soul is inclined to desire humiliation, suffering and self-

abasement. In a word, the soul seeks the path that Our Lord Jesus Christ chose and followed here on earth. Submitting her will to God's, the soul is drawn towards all that crucifies natural inclinations.

St. Ignatius calls these the degrees of humility, but you can see that they are also degrees of conformity to the will of God and degrees of love. The last degree even has a quality of ardent passion for the soul is not only conformed to the will of God but says to Him, "Lord, You have shown me that there is something more. You have revealed your Word to me, You have shown me Your Son, He who is the object of Your divine pleasure, humble, poor, abject and suffering. If you give me a choice, if You allow my will to be in conformity with the will You showed for Your divine Son, it is to that I am drawn."

We must examine ourselves often concerning these three degrees of humility as presented by St. Ignatius and we should try to achieve at least the second degree. If love overflows and we find ourselves in the third degree, let us bless the Lord. But we must first be solidly established in the second. This absence of choice is true abandonment into the hands of God and I would like to be a particular object of your devotion and your desires.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that it is easy to acquire this conformity to the will of God. As with humility, this virtue has its degrees. First of all, there is resignation. Because God wants it, that is the way it must be. We undergo things because they cannot be otherwise. We go forward moaning and sighing all the way like the cow in the Scriptures which, when attached to the Ark of the Covenant, advanced but kept turning back moaning, towards the stables where she had left her calves.

This is the first degree and it is meritorious because one is acting according to the will of God. But is it worthy of God to act according to His will saying, "This is the way it has to be," as if we were directed by a master we do not love, to whom we submit and from whom we do not expect anything good? Should we not unite our will to His so that we say all through the day, "I have entered religion to seek Your will, to fulfill it with the most perfectly I can. It is the will of my God, my Father, my Spouse."

In this way, we begin to live in the will of God. We wake up and we go to sleep saying, "*Not my will but Thine be done.*"¹ This song may sound sad and monotonous, says St. Francis de Sales but it is the constant cry of the Lamb. "That Your will be done"! Let it dwell in your soul and repeat it incessantly. There are circumstances in life when it is almost the only thing that we can say. God knows best what is good for us and He will give us only wonderful things.

¹ Lk. 22,42.

With ardent love we raise our souls to Him and render Him homage by this simple act of consent, "Your will be done."

In the beginning I said to you that you must be true worshippers in spirit and in truth and that you have come here to give honor and glory to God. But don't you think that in order to give honor and glory to God, personally and publicly, we should consider all events, all plans, all manifestations of the will of God as sovereignly good and worthy of adoration? If adoration thus responds to all God wishes and if the soul consents to His plans because He is the supreme good communicating itself, you can understand that this is more than simple resignation. The soul then habitually desires only what God wants in such a way that this beautiful phrase may be applied to her, "My will in her."²

Of all the characteristics of holiness, the one which I desire the most for you is that you be so rooted in the will of God that always and in all things you love, seek and bless this will. This becomes abandonment into the hands of God and it is the surest, most complete and most perfect union that can be established between God and His creature. This is the teaching of St. Teresa. Although she had experienced moments of union and ecstasy in contemplation, this saint tells us that true union of our soul with God consists in union of the will. When a person is entirely established in the will of God, she desires nothing more. God possesses her and she possesses God.

It seems to me that one of our particular characteristics must be to grow each day in the union of our will with that of God. "Your kingdom come," is one of our mottoes. Faithfully and ardently add this other petition contained in the Our Father, "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." The angels and saints in heaven love, reference, adore and carry out the will of ceaselessly. You, by your life of zeal, like visible angels should stand before God ready to act at the least sign of His will. When a person has arrived at this degree of obedience, Her whole being is consumed by service, adoration and love. She bears within her here on earth, something similar to the heavenly Kingdom to which we belong even more than any other creature because we are daughters of the Assumption of Mary.

Seek the dispositions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Who adores her son more than she? Who humbled herself before God as she did? In whom has the will of God reigned and still reigns today more generously, more completely and more lovingly than in the Queen of the seraphim and the angels? She is our Queen and she asks us, as daughters of the Assumption, to adopt the dispositions which she took with her into the kingdom of Heaven.

² Is. 62, 4.