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Renewal in the Life of Faith

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

Now that many Sisters from our House¹ are here, I would like to speak to you of certain points to which we must frequently return, if we are to be perfectly imbued with the spirit of the religious life. I shall take the most important and the most essential, today, and this is the life of faith.

Annual retreats are intended to renew our life of faith. The meditations we make during days of retreat put new vigour into this life. What do we meditate on? Eternal truths: who God is; what we are before Him; how important the least of our actions is in the light of eternity because God takes account of all that we do and nothing remains unrewarded. We meditate on that purity of intention which makes all our works meritorious. We meditate on the infinite gift God gave us in Our Lord Jesus Christ, the living proof of His infinite love for us. We meditate on the debt we owe Him and on the importance of striving to resemble Him more and more.

These are the subjects of our meditations, not only during our retreats, but also throughout the year. If we are really penetrated by these thoughts, if our understanding, our hearts, and our wills are permeated by these truths, then we live by faith. These truths fill our life. We live more by them than by what we see, or hear, or perceive by our senses, understand by our intellect, in short, by what is purely of the natural order. Though pressed on all sides by things of the natural order, we rise above them by faith and we live by truths that lead to eternal life. This is the life of faith.

I would like to go further. In order to live by faith, it is necessary to be habitually recollected and to know by experience something of what St. Teresa calls the interior castle. She tells us that God in His majesty dwells in the centre of the soul. This is true even in the natural order because God is everywhere. This is true, above all, in the order of grace because by baptism God takes possession of the soul and makes it His dwelling place as long as sin does not drive

¹ “Particular Houses”: expression used by Mother Marie Eugenie

Him away. God is present in the soul not only as He is everywhere, but He is present in a special way by making Himself known and loved.

He is present in the soul by preference. He is there as in a temple, and that is why Holy Scripture calls the soul the temple of God.

But of what value is this indwelling of God in the soul if we do not pay attention to it, if we do not withdraw from exterior things and enter into ourselves in order to adore God who dwells there? There are many baptised persons who can hardly be said to be in the first mansion because they pray by mere routine.

A Dominican Father told me that he found in the missions a people who had little mills in their temples. These small mills carried printed prayers that turned continuously before their gods. These pagans could not have done better. But among Christians, how many are like mills turning when they pray? This is so because they do not enter into themselves before praying; they do not keep recollected in the presence of God. Unfortunately, there are many persons, even religious, who, at one time or another in their life, are more like these 'prayer wheels' than like those who dwell in the first mansion, that is to say, those who apply themselves to meditation.

In the measure in which we withdraw our affection from created things, so do love, fidelity, purity of heart, of intention, and of conduct, grow in the soul. We penetrate more deeply into the inner mansion. And He, who is in the centre of the soul as the brightest of suns, finally makes the brightness and warmth of His presence felt in some way. This presence can be a source of suffering for the soul. This is easy to understand because between God and us, there is an infinite distance. We are sinful creatures and God is purity itself. There is therefore, need of purification before we can approach God.

To suffer during prayer, to be without consolation because God seems to be far from us is not a bad sign. But to continue to look for satisfaction in exterior things, to be distracted, to be indifferent to habitual imperfections and voluntary faults which displease God, to judge persons, things, and events from a natural point of view rather than from God's point of view, these are bad signs. The life of faith tends to make us close our eyes to exterior things in order to contemplate the interior, to close our ears to the noise of the world in order to listen to the word of God spoken always very softly in our soul; to hear it we must be interiorly very quiet. Persons who talk too much and take pleasure in much talking can never be interior souls. St. Jane de Chantal says that a talkative person can never be a truly spiritual person because to become one, it is necessary to know how to be silent, to listen, and to enter into oneself.

But remember, Sisters, that it is impossible for you to be habitually recollected, to be united with Our Lord in His mysteries and to reflect the light of these mysteries in your life, unless you exert much effort. We cannot live the interior life, we cannot be habitually attentive to the presence of God dwelling in us as in His temple or coming to us in Holy Communion and giving us His Spirit, His grace, all that He has and all that He is, we cannot live this life, unless we make constant and persevering efforts. Therefore, it is necessary for us to renew our life of faith constantly, to apply ourselves to it energetically, to withdraw from exterior things, not only during the time of the annual retreat, but also throughout the year to keep our vision clear through daily meditation.

In this way, dear Sisters, we come to forget ourselves by withdrawing our affection from creatures and by overcoming our natural inclinations, the force of habit, and inattention. If we have been talkative before, it could have been more by force of habit than because of the pleasure we found in it. Talkativeness, however, is a bad habit because it keeps us from praying and from being recollected. We often do things by habit without reflection. There are persons who say; "I go there like the leaf blown by the wind". It is precisely against this that we must react in order not to allow ourselves to act from habit, to fall into routine, and to stagnate in our spiritual life.

I shall add that to live by faith, it is necessary to learn how to see creatures as God sees them. This is not easy. God and Our Lord Jesus Christ look at creatures differently from the way we do. Jesus Christ sees in all rational creatures, souls bought with His own Blood, and whose salvation, therefore, He ardently desires. He sees in all creation the work of His Father, originally good, but now disfigured by sin. And as everything that God made is a proof of His love for men, so everything is for Jesus Christ, as it should be for us, an occasion of thanksgiving, of adoration, of praise, and of prayer. Finally, there are the trials, the contradictions, the sufferings in life, in death, in all the vicissitudes of human existence. Well, we must look at all these as coming from the hands of God.

We feel miserable when we lose the vision of faith because we stop at secondary causes. The truth is that God directs all things, His will is in all the circumstances of our life, and what God expects of us on all occasions is virtue. Why does God put us in this or that painful or difficult situation? He does it so that we might practise virtue. Look at the Saints and the Martyrs. In all the circumstances in which they found themselves, they practised virtue, gave honour to God, showed perfect submission in trials, unwavering faith in God, patience, equanimity, and self-possession and thus were able to offer themselves as an oblation to God.

There are saints who have sanctified themselves in the state of virginity, of marriage, and of widowhood². Take St. Elisabeth of Portugal for example. Her life was filled with trials. The last of these was caused by her own sons. She tried to stop them from fighting against each other but she died on the way and it was her dead body that brought about the reconciliation. It is a great suffering for a queen to see her country rent by civil strife and for a mother to see her children at war among themselves. In all this, she saw the permissive will of God. Without this faith she could not have shown in the midst of her trials and travels, in the world and in the royal court, the virtue that God wants to draw from all our trials and which alone pleases Him.

A saintly person said that God does not take pleasure in seeing us suffer but He takes pleasure in seeing us accept suffering and practise virtue. He delights in seeing Our Lord Jesus Christ live in us through trial and sacrifice. If we had faith, we would so live that on all occasions we would keep peace and charity in our souls through faith. In this way we intensify the life of faith which is the foundation of our religious life.

Do you think, Sisters, that God called us out of the world for some other purpose than to live the life of faith? St. Paul says that the just man lives by faith³. He wrote this about Abraham. We religious, should apply these words to ourselves. The persons we meet expect to find in us not only the natural virtues and good sentiments. They expect, above all, to see us live by what we believe. And it is for this that God has chosen us.

² "Widowhood": word used by Mother Marie Eugenie

³ Heb 10:38

Renew then in yourselves, Sisters, the life of faith and live it to the best of your ability when you return to your house⁴. This will make the Assumption very pleasing to Our Lord who, when He was about to leave this world, said sorrowfully: “When the Son of Man comes, do you think He will find faith in the world?⁵” See how little faith there is in the world. Therefore, let us try our best to live by faith because as consolers of Our Lord we ought to give Him in abundance what the world does not give Him enough.



⁴ “Particular Houses”: expression used by Mother Marie Eugenie

⁵ Lk 18:8