

RENEWAL OF FERVOUR

25th June 1876

My dear Daughters,

The renewal of fervour: that is a thing that applies to every moment of our life. From time to time, say month by month, go back in thought to the most fervent hours and days of your life, when God gave you the grace of higher thoughts on your vocation and on obedience, and stirred you to a greater spirit of prayer. Now is a good time for this as a preparation for the Retreat. Make an effort to revive your attention to God's Presence, and your care to do everything generously for Him.

A second thing I recommend is the fear of God and the esteem of the Rule. By the fear of God I mean what St. Teresa meant: namely guarding the purity of your heart from any fault or imperfect sentiment or from accepting interiorly anything suggestive of evil, because God sees to the very bottom of our heart. That is why the fear of displeasing Him, of offending Him, should day by day increase the - purity of the inner sanctuary where God deigns to come so often in Holy Communion. This purity should grow day by day.

Fidelity never to accept any imperfect disposition is a great mark of fervour. For our life here on earth is full of temptations and contradictions and trials. St. John of the Cross, far from watering down this view of life expresses it with great force. He says that Religious are placed side by side in a monastery as little stones might be put in a bag and shaken hard till their sharp corners are rubbed away and they become smooth and polished. To be put in a bag and knocked about till we have our corners rubbed off is not at all an attractive process!

It would be a mistake to think that the ideal of the Religious Life is to have no annoyances and no tiresome neighbours, to be always liked and approved of and treated with consideration, and to enjoy everything that can be desired whether in Superiors or equals or inferiors. The true ideal is for each one to attend to herself so as to establish within her soul the reign of patience, humility, regular observance, fervour and love of God, so as to become like St. Aloysius, a martyr by generous dispositions of mind and heart. When St. Aloysius died it was revealed to St. Magdalen of Pazzi that by his great love for God and the way he put up with sufferings great and small he had acquired all the dispositions that earn a martyr's crown. She could hardly believe that there could be greater glory in Heaven than what this young man who had not completed his noviceship had achieved.

There is a disposition that we must continually renew all our life long that shows great love of God; you may find it hard to believe that it consists in keeping our heart pure and faithful by never harbouring an imperfect thought or feeling that would offend Him, no resentment, or antipathy, no protest, even a silent one, or pride or any imperfect thought that might make one neglect God's service. There are so many thoughts floating round in our mind that the Devil tries to use for our hurt, never accept any of them if you want your heart to be the translucent crystal it ought to be, (or as Bossuet says, the clear pool of water that reflects the sunlight. So you see how purity of heart and fear of the Lord are great elements of fervour. But a thing I must add is, esteem for the Rule. Read it often and apply it to yourself. It is for everyone. Each one must consider it her own special book, and attend to all its points so as to reproduce them in her actions.

In Religion one ought to live as though alone with God and not pay attention to other people's faults except when this is a duty of one's

state. But as to ourselves, we should often examine how we practise courtesy, obedience, mortification, charity; and we should cultivate the kind of zeal that would make us (do as Blessed Peter Fourrier did, and) keep the Rule all the more perfectly and faithfully as if we were the only one to do so. Blessed Peter Fourrier lived in a Community of Augustinians who were relaxed. He kept a little bell in his cell to ring for all the Ceremonies and Community exercises. In this way he was alone among many to keep the Rule, and he did so with extraordinary perfection. Thanks be to God, Sisters, you are not like him in living among relaxed Religious, but I mention this to show you what made a saint of Blessed Peter Fourrier. It was not other people's holiness but his own fervour and humility.)

A thing that can sometimes weaken one's spirit of fervour is this: one has had the small upset of a change of house or of employment, or one no longer has the same Superior that one had when one was more fervent; or one may even notice the faults of one's Superior. Drop all that, Sisters, rise up above such littleness and look higher, at Our Lord Himself. See Him in everything by greater faith, so that by keeping your Rule and your Vows you may attain great fervour.

Dear daughters, many things might be said about all this, but I will only mention one: if you take the resolution of being zealous for regular observance, of constantly rousing your spirit of prayer and the spirit of faith that makes you see God in all things and take everything from His hand, that will be more than enough to keep your fervour always fresh. But she must constantly say to oneself: "I am beginning again, I will renew what was good in my past and set to work with fresh courage".

Here I must warn you of a danger: beware of examining past faults and imperfections. Anyone who is too prone to examine the past and the circumstances when she was cowardly, lazy, careless, not only

gains nothing but exposes herself to the old temptations and to discouragement as well.

When we beg God's pardon He does not expect us or wish us to search for all the faults of the last five or six days. Certainly, we should do so when we prepare for Confession; but apart from that it is much better to make a good act of Contrition and say: "My God, how badly I have served You! I am poor and weak and a coward, the last and least in this holy house of yours. I beg your pardon for all I have done amiss, and now I want to serve you with my whole heart". As you know, an act of Love for God like this has power to wipe out venial sin, and even mortal sin, if it is made with perfect love and the desire for Confession.

So when you think of your faults try hard to make a lot of acts of love - and make them as perfect as you can. But do not live over again the six days or six years in which you were cowardly and imperfect. It is better far to remember the graces God gave you and to be faithful to them and to the high ideals you had on regular observance and perfection, on purity of heart and obedience, so as to revive your fervour. If on the contrary you dwell on your failures you revive what may have angered you or made you discontented, and also thoughts of pride and discouragement.

The advice of all the masters of the spiritual life is to leave the past and its wretchedness and imperfection, to cast all that into the ocean of God's infinite mercy and remember only His kindness, His graces, and His lights. By this means we can be more generously faithful to His lights, grateful for His graces and ardent in His love. And the thing that will be of the greatest help towards this is the memory of God's loving-kindness, of His gifts and graces, and of His boundless mercy.