

24 March 1878

V. SERVE JESUS CHRIST THROUGH WORK AND IN OBEDIENCE

Although we should listen to the Word of God today, I cannot delay going over with you what we have already said on the spirit of the Assumption. I showed you last time that to know Our Lord Jesus Christ perfectly we must learn about Him as perfectly as possible by studying theology. In a holier and more supernatural way we should do so by attention, recollection and union of the soul with His Divine presence.

After having spoken to you of the perfect knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I would now like to speak to you about the perfect service of Our Lord. We have seen that we are created in the image of God, now let us see that we are His servants. If we are destined to live for all eternity in the company of the angels because we are created in the image of God and because our intelligence is destined to be filled with divine knowledge, we must not forget that we also have a body, talents to put to use and a mission to fulfill in this world.

Even before the Fall man had to work. God had told him that he was placed in the earthly paradise to work there. When God condemned man to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow after his sin, work became a law of the human condition. Without doubt, we must work to know God, but this is not enough. We must also serve Him perfectly. But how are we to serve Him? By means of work. What kind of a servant would the person be who does not work? We must work hard then, serving God in all the tasks entrusted to us, and we must sanctify our work by offering it to God.

Each one of us has a task to perform. Whether we cook, clean, sew, take care of the community's needs or teach classes, supervise the children or keep the door, each of us finds in her work the way to serve God because all these things are done for His service. One day He will say to us: 'Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord. You have been faithful in using the talents I entrusted to you.'¹ Be diligent Sisters, to work with courage, confidence and generosity. Sanctify your work through prayers. Always work for God and never for yourselves.

Now I come to the second quality which must be characteristic of a servant who is the Spouse of Christ and who desires to serve Him perfectly.

¹ Mt. 25, 23.

It is work sanctified through obedience, having a spirit of obedience in all we do. This must serve as a guide for the entire life of a religious.

The rules of certain Orders apply to obedient souls these words of the Psalmist: "My eyes are lifted to you, Lord, as the eyes of a servant are on the eyes of her Mistress."² This simply means that at the least sign or manifestation of the will of God, the soul is always ready. We are ready to come or go, to do this thing or that; in short, we are ready to give ourselves. This is what Our Lord expects of us, to obey in all our actions promptly and joyfully, to bless them all with the merits of obedience. When we sleep, it is the Rule which tells us for how long. When we eat, once again, it is in the Rule. We go to our classes or we do one job or another and all these actions are governed by obedience.

You can see by this that a person who serves Jesus Christ perfectly is the one who obeys, who is faithful and generous in the least things, whose eyes are fixed on the Lord in order to accomplish His will and who has this intention in everything. We are constantly saying to God: "I do this because it is Your Will, I want to obey You, submitting myself perfectly in obedience and not seeking my own will."

I must however point out a danger for each one has her own way of seeing things and her own ideas. If, outside obedience, we accomplish something that may be good in itself, the fact that we have acted against what is asked of us means that we have not rendered a perfect service. The one who serves does exactly as told. If someone were building a cathedral and the plans called for Roman arches, what would happen if a workman had the fanciful idea of erecting a Gothic arch in their midst? The arch might be perfectly executed, but it would ruin a building in the Romanesque style. Likewise, your own ideas may be very good and admirable the day you are asked for them. But at any other time, obedience requires that you accomplish each task as you are requested and in the way you are asked from start to finish, if you wish to serve Our Lord perfectly.

I also insist on a third characteristic that I feel belongs to the spirit of the Assumption. This is disinterested service. Anyone who desires to work for God must be detached from self. It is of no importance that people consider your work very well done, that you are intelligent, that something you have done is of excellent quality. Since it is God whom you are serving your work must be disinterested. You are not seeking personal gain, but rather to serve Our Lord perfectly. What difference does it make then, if you serve Him in one way or another?

² Ps. 122, 1-2.

See how this disinterestedness leads to religious perfection. It is no longer a job, nor approval nor any reason whatsoever that influences a person who, having passed from knowledge to imitation of Our Lord and even to union with Him, reaches through obedience a state of continual dependence on Him, an uninterrupted desire to offer all work to Our Lord in complete detachment from self. This is a kind of commentary on the Act of Love, "My God, I love You above all things and more than myself."

To put this prayer into practice, that is, to love God truly more than ourselves, we must not consider what profit the work we are doing has in store for us, but rather we must consider that it is God who desires it and that it is pleasing to Him. In accomplishing it moment after moment, we remain in an attitude of generosity and obedience to God.

Lastly, there is the perfection of the most ordinary actions. If perfect service of God consists of work, in obedience and in unselfish detachment with regard to the results of our work so that we seek God in all things, then love desires perfection in the smallest things that we do in His service. There is a quality of perfection to be given to each of our actions so that it may be holy, wise, loveable and in the spirit of the Rule. Whoever works at this, pays great attention to all her actions, be this prayer, Office, conversations, relationship with the children, teaching and studying, recreations and even meals. Perfection in ordinary actions is the mark of a person who serves perfectly.

I will leave with these four thoughts. They are very practical and they concern primarily the exterior aspect of perfection. If we have this external perfection, that can help immensely towards attaining interior perfection. God will be "at home" in a person who works in obedience and disinterestedness and who strives for perfection in the most ordinary actions.

Here are my reflections concerning perfect service. Later I will speak of perfect love. It is evident that all these qualities are in reality intertwined, inseparable from one another. You only know perfectly what you love. Yet it is sometimes good to separate the various elements to see how they can be embraced in an order to perfection that transcends the ordinary Christian life.

The young girls who come here have a high ideal of the religious life. When they see a religious, they expect her to be detached from self, perfect in her least actions, modest and recollected. These are fruits of a life of prayer and union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Strive with great generosity and diligence, showing what you are for Our Lord, so that others, seeing your good works, will glorify your Heavenly Father who by His grace has called you, by His grace upholds you and helps you to accomplish these things.