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VIII. PERFECT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST, LOVE OF OUR
NEIGHBOR, THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

I will continue speaking about the spirit of the Assumption because it seems to me that what I want to say today coincides with the mystery of the Resurrection. In a way, the Assumption is a kind of resurrection. It is the life of Mary begun already in heaven. This shows us that our life should always have a touch of joy, even in our struggles and sacrifices. We will experience heart-breaking moments but the way in which we handle these situations should reflect more of heaven than of earth. I would say, therefore, that the last two fruits which the love of Christ should produce in us are charity and a spirit of sacrifice.

In meditating these last few days on the discourse after the Last Supper, you have seen that love is the sign by which Christ wants His disciples to be recognized. This love in us should be characterized by simplicity, openness and honesty. The Constitutions tell us that charity is a love born of God by which we love each other with the same love that God has for us and with the same aim: their holiness in this world and eternal happiness in the next. This love is not a natural love, but devoted love, true love, a love which, not being based on what is pleasing, seeks what is good and useful for the persons whom we love. May this charity reign among you, Sisters, in the same spirit in which Jesus Christ related to people during His earthly life; in the spirit of the Blessed Virgin, which was one of mercy, peace, goodness and devotedness. This is what the spirit of the Assumption asks of us.

The other fruit and characteristic which the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ should produce in us is the spirit of sacrifice. In what you have just meditated you have the direct teaching of Our Lord, "That the world may know that I love the Father. Arise, let us go from here."¹ This means let us go to meet sacrifice so the world will know that I love my Father. Sacrifice is therefore the sign, the fruit and the characteristic of love. Why include mortification with charity? At Easter, must we speak of mortification? Yes, because this is a virtue which must be practiced every day in the Christian and religious life. Christian life has a basis of mortification and what best

¹ Jn. 14, 31.

suits the daughters of the Assumption is the mortification proposed by the feast of the Resurrection.

To live in the divine life, we must mortify ourselves; we must leave behind earthly life, carnal inclinations, and mortify all that is evil in us. I link this with charity because true charity cannot exist without a spirit of mortification and of sacrifice. Mortify all that is against charity in you. Do not make mortification your life, do not stop there. Live the divine life that Our Lord brings us through His Resurrection. "Risen with Christ, seek the things that are above."²

It would seem that here is the true characteristic of our mortification; to free ourselves from all that is earthly, not to stop at what is pleasing to the senses, to raise ourselves higher, seeking purity in heavenly things such as the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Blessed Virgin. We should imitate Jesus and Mary in a spirit of generosity, devotedness and love of our neighbor. In order to be charitable we must mortify our inclinations towards impatience, susceptibility and the tendency to put ourselves before others which means that we love ourselves more than we love others.

There is, however, a legitimate preference that must be maintained. We must concern ourselves without own salvation before that of others. These two things must be kept in their proper perspective. We cannot sacrifice our own perfection to that of others. A certain order should be maintained. In what concerns salvation, our first duty is to ourselves, but in all other things we must place our neighbor before ourselves. St. Vincent de Paul was always busier obtaining bread for others than for himself and you must have seen this same disposition in many others. This is what made Sr. Denise Marie, our lay sister who died in Poitiers say, "I have always asked God that if there is something to be suffered in the house it fall on me. If there is to be sickness and death let it be for me rather than for my dear sisters." You can see that when it was a question of earthly things, even the health of the body, she preferred her sisters to herself. If it were a question of eternal salvation it would be different.

We must be concerned for our own salvation. God does not ask of us things that are too difficult. All He asks is that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Our Lord went further than this. He loved us more than Himself and gave Himself up for us, He suffered for us. He did not seek equality and it is for this reason that the saints followed Him and

² Col. 1:3, 1,2

His way, placing themselves in the third degree of humility, which we have also called the third degree of love and of conformity to the will of God. But to reach this point we should never forget that we must be solidly established in the second degree where the will is detached and turned towards those things which God desires. Then the soul has a true and efficacious desire to obtain for others the good that she seeks for herself.

But we can go further still and reach the generous disposition which completes the character of a religious of the Assumption, the spirit of sacrifice.

Over and above the mortification that leads us to renunciation in little things and to the desire for eternal things, beyond our personal interests with their worry and agitation, over and above our fraternal charity, there is the spirit of self-sacrifice. This is a wonderful thing! What I said of Sr. Denise Marie is an example among many others. How many of you have met people who sacrifice themselves for God and their neighbor. It is a flame that is enkindled by other virtues. When these virtues are present in the soul then the spirit of sacrifice is enkindled by them, the flame is lit. Should this flame appear before hand, do not trust it too much. Do not reject it either because it will help you to acquire the other virtues.

May your hearts be filled with this desire to immolate yourselves for God and for your neighbor, to take upon yourselves all that demands sacrifice, all that humbles. You can understand that if the heart is burning with this flame, it resembles our Lord Jesus Christ more closely. But at the same time do not forget that if this fire of love is desirable in itself, acts that follow from it are subject to obedience. No one can commit herself by promise or by vow, to accomplish anything that goes beyond the limits of the Rule. You must seek advice, ask and remain obedient. To have this desire, to burn with this flame, to seek in the Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ the love that led Him to sacrifice Himself for us, does not require permission as long as it is not the matter of a promise!

This desire must be a part of our spirit since one so often sees it in the daughters of the Assumption. I have assisted at many deathbeds and I have nearly always found this spirit of sacrifice, this desire for immolation, this desire to offer oneself for the Church, for the Congregation and for the world.

Some of you were with me during the agony of Sr. Marie Andree. She suffered greatly: a death slowly experienced and slowly tasted. You will remember that during this time she did not tire of offering herself for the Church, the Congregation, for the spiritual good and growth of the sisters

and for the salvation of souls. Until the very end, all her strength went into this sacrifice to God. Her nights passed in terrible suffering. Once after some tablets had given her a peaceful night she told the next day, "If I take those tablets I will have nothing left to offer to God. I will waste my nights." She was frightened as it were, to lose what she considered a great treasure because of her love and generosity in suffering. It is better to offer oneself when God asks it than to make heroic declarations which perhaps, will not be carried through when the time comes.

There is a nuance in the spirit of sacrifice, mortification and generosity that I would like to see imprinted in your souls. It is something that is always in harmony with the will of God, with everything charity asks. It lights up when the moment comes, but does not try to run ahead of Providence. This is the sign of a soul truly given to Our Lord, of a heart that is loving and entirely under His action. This is far more desirable than the acts of imagination which can lead us to believe we have something that we do not yet possess.

May Our Lord imprint on you these traits which belong to the Passion but which were not destroyed by the Resurrection. It is by a death filled with both the lights of heaven and the sufferings of earth, that all the saints found Our Lord.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself the hardest part, the bitterest of all chalices, the most extreme abandonment. Under whatever form He calls you to follow Him, work your entire life to leave the things of this world behind, loving God, loving your neighbor for His sake and denying yourself to the point of immolation.

May your hearts remain pure through mortification and separation from all imperfections and may your charity be so ardent that you respond to the spirit of sacrifice when it presents itself and God asks it.