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XII. THE NATURAL VIRTUES AS THE FOUNDATION OF SUPERNATURAL VIRTUES

To continue what we have been saying until now, I ought to speak of the interior and supernatural life which seems to be appropriate to the spirit of the Assumption. That would be too long however and would require several chapters. Today, I would like to discuss just one point which is essential to the spirit of the Assumption and which has been pointed out by several persons, for instance, the Bishop of Poitiers, as being the special characteristic of our Institute. He noted that the attention given to the natural virtues is the most marked characteristic of our spirit.

Observe, Sisters, that there is a foundation for the supernatural virtues; it is the original rectitude of nature. This is not yet grace. Below the supernatural and the divine, below Jesus Christ in the soul, there is a natural integrity in which God created mankind. It is to the glory of God that this natural integrity be restored in His creatures. Therein we find straightforwardness, openness, thoughtfulness, simplicity, honor, kindness and courage. Look for other natural virtues. Sisters, if you wish, for I do not remember all of them, I point out only the family of these virtues as it is eminently in the spirit of the Assumption that we acquire these virtues.

You know that without openness and straightforwardness one could not live in the Assumption, one would not be of the Assumption. There are several reasons why not. First, because of our special vocation, to give honor and glory to God, to sum up our entire life in "Laus Deo", (Praise God). Also because of our love of truth, of the Church and of Jesus Christ who should be glorified by our witness to the natural integrity of mankind such as God created him. Sin destroyed this natural rectitude, introduced deceit, took away selflessness, disinterested service and a sense of honor. Man was created honest, simple and good. In our desire for the glory of God, we must seek to acquire these natural virtues which serve as a foundation for the supernatural ones. People who know us observe in us this particular characteristic and it is in the plan of God that this be so.

A more serious reason for this is the mission of education entrusted to us. Through education we must convey the supernatural spirit, we must allow Jesus Christ to live in souls and must form in them a vision of faith. But is it not also a daily task to re-establish this natural rectitude in the soul? From infancy there is something that perverts it. The little child is already a glutton, a tale-teller, selfish and often cruel. There is an inclination towards

self-centeredness which is a result of sin. Given our mission of education we should have a great zeal to re-establish in ourselves and in the souls entrusted to us, this foundation of virtue.

This is however, not yet Christian virtue, it is not yet what the life of Jesus Christ in the soul should be, but it is a necessary basis because Our Lord is pleased with those who are upright. As the holy Precursor said, we must make straight His paths and fill up all the valleys. These are “valleys” in the soul and paths that are not straight. The work that we have to do with the children is to help them to be simple. Honest, straightforward, loyal, generous, honoring all that is best in human nature. On these foundations, grace will produce marvelous effects and create something magnanimous, noble, holy, something eternal.

It may seem strange but a life that is simply pious does not always produce these effects. Everyone knows that there are pious persons who are not straightforward, generous devoted and in whom we do not find openness, a sense of honor or loyalty. There are persons who ally a certain mystic piety with traits that create a bad impression on others. I would even say that this sort of piety puts people off most from the Church and from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Those in the world who are not Christians would like to see in Christians at least a noble character. Instead they often find this nobility to a remarkable degree in sinners.

If a sinner can be endowed with natural virtues, while the pious person who is in the state of grace does not have these natural virtues, a sad contrast is created which redounds neither to the glory of Our Lord and His Church nor to the conversion of sinners. You, Sisters, who are called to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls ought to understand how much care is needed so that all, be it yourselves or others, should be good, amiable, simple, open and generous, I stress this point because it is particular to us.

The Fathers of the Assumption, Father Picard and Father d’Alzon used to say that without openness and simplicity we do not have the spirit of the Assumption. I add that if one does not have the kindness that is true goodness, we do not have the spirit of the Assumption either. Goodness is certainly a supernatural virtue but it is also a natural one, it is both. The spirit of the Assumption requires that we return to original goodness and that we ask for the grace of Jesus Christ who made us good because He is eminently good.

I strongly advise you Sisters, to cultivate these values. Serious sin does not deprive us of them. There precisely lies the danger. To be cowardly is not a great sin. A person who did not actually lie but who

deviated a little from the truth, whose answer was neither yes nor no, has she sinned? Yet she has degraded herself and has not honored God in herself. All those who, in seeking God, sought their own interests, too, have they sinned? Persons whose judgments are ordinary unkind but who do not express them and who as a consequence do not speak any ill-will or calumny, have they sinned? If I do not have compassionate goodness that goes out to towards others... that helps those who suffer – that goodness which fills all the pages of the Gospel – have I sinned?

Persons, who without tending towards perfection want nevertheless to conserve their souls in an adequate purity, often have great illusions in this regard. They think they do not have to exert any effort to improve themselves or to grow in goodness, generosity and loyalty. Thus it happens that “sinners” sometimes appear to be far better than they. This should not be the case of the Assumption and I recommend as one of the characteristics of our spirit that you acquire this kind of virtue.