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XIII. THE PRUDENCE FITTING FOR A RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION

Sometime ago I spoke of the natural virtues which could be practiced by a Religious of the Assumption. I wish now to speak of another virtue which belongs to the natural and supernatural order, namely prudence, about which we sometimes have ideas that are not exact.

We often hear it said, "I am not particularly prudent but I manage without it." Note, Sisters, there is prudence and prudence! There is worldly prudence which is undesirable and the prudence that I consider a Religious of the Assumption should have. It is about this I will speak.

The prudence of a Religious of the Assumption should consist, first of all in knowing the teaching of the Church as far as possible and in following it. This is the type of prudence that seems indispensable to me it is supernatural, holy and fits all circumstances. When people speak to me of imprudences committed in some communities by the superior, the treasurer or someone else, it is generally because the Church's teaching has been neglected. If one always followed the counsels and rules of the Church, then communities would have the true Christian and supernatural prudence.

It is the same for individuals. These are rules of the Church on a vast number of matters, on confession, on communion, on our relations with each other or with those around us. These laws of the Church concern us as they have been approved and applied to our lives by the authority of the Holy See. Since there are so many different rules, we cannot know them all and need the help of wise and enlightened people to advise us. I say this especially for those in authority. Their great concern in deciding some matters should be to know what is the thought of the Church. Whether it concerns temporal goods, a foundation to be made or a house to be closed, or how to act with certain people, we should know what the Church thinks and whether it is approved of or not. Then with the confidence we should have in the Church's decision, we should show prudence in conforming to it.

This is a first form of prudence. There is another very suitable one for the Religious of the Assumption. This consists of regulating the movements of the soul by prudence. Anyone who behaves thus is a person who will act prudently in the long run. "All desires do not come from the Holy Spirit even if they seem good and right," says the author of the imitation. Each one has

certain impulses of nature. If we have a strong impulse, nature urges us to act on it. Prudence, on the other hand stops us so that we may examine whether it is regulated by nature of the virtue of prudence.

We all have movements of impatience, attraction, disgust or repugnance and things that uplift us. If you feel something acutely, you should ask yourself whether it is pleasing to God and in accord with humility, obedience and the other virtues. If you generally control your impulses by virtue you will become loving with those whom you find disagreeable. If you form the habit of conquering the vivacity of nature in difficulties and contradictions, if in short, you behave as Our Lord recommended to many saints, by doing readily what is displeasing and avoiding what pleases you most, then I firmly believe that reason and prudence will dominate in your life.

No one can say, "I have no need of prudence for I have an impulsive nature and act accordingly." This is not possible for us as Religious of the Assumption for we are committed to work to perfect our nature by this supernatural prudence allied to faith. We do not attain it immediately but must work steadily and constantly that it may be obtained. When we have followed an impulse of nature we should say, "This will not do. I must remain calm and recollected saying or doing nothing until it has passed." Or again, "I should act in God's sight and because He wishes it, not because it may please or displease me or because I am forced to if by an ardent urge."

There are people who are suddenly seized with a burning desire to practice austerities for some particular aim. This is foolish and often a purely natural impulse. If they follow the rules of prudence, the ardor will be resisted and the idea submitted to obedience. Wise direction will help them to dominate it. When everything becomes calm again and obedience or God's will calls them to act otherwise, this will be accepted because it is His will.

The eldest among us have all met this type of person, readily attracted by what appears by what appears good, but which is not edifying in reality. On the other hand, those who possess this Christian virtue act in God's presence, not of themselves but because Our Lord seems to guide them and dwells in them in peace, meekness and obedience. This way of acting edifies and goes good.

This brings me to the third kind of prudence which is generally more easily understood and accepted. It consists in examining our actions to see whether or not they dis-edify others. For sample, we may think that if we are impatient it only harms ourselves but does not affect others. But if we

have frightened a child by our impatience, have we been edifying? This is the important question.

I do not believe a religious should ever be really dis-edifying even to help herself out of a difficulty. This is because a religious should desire Christ to live in her and she should extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls and should decide her way of life by the Gospel.

Perhaps, by a movement of impatience, you have obtained more work, silence or study from the pupils and you feel a momentary sense of achievement. However will the pupils feel they have seen the Gospel at work in their teacher? Will they have great respect for the religious life? Will their faith grow, their piety develop? In other words have they been edified? Will you have put something of Christ's own spirit in them? These are the result you should always seek in your actions.

There you have the three points of view I thought of when wondering how to explain to you what prudence means. There are far too many people who view prudence in too human a fashion and ask themselves whether prudence is really necessary. It is necessary and we should try to acquire it. St. Francis of Sales said that if charity is the queen of virtues, prudence is another queen for it places everything in the proper order. I do not aim so high but I do recommend prudence!

Know the rules of the Church and conform fully to their spirit. Moderate the movements of the soul by this virtue. Do not follow every impulse and do not act simply because something appears good.

Be peaceful within and act in all things according to obedience, poverty, renunciation and the other virtues. Examine the consequences of your actions since you seek to edify.

Remember you should always prefer a religious spirit to any good you might wish to do. Since religious life advocates silence so as to be recollected, do not allow outside things to distract you and do not receive too many visitors. What happens if you do? The religious spirit disappears. The Rule which tells us that in order to do good we should not neglect our duties within is no longer practiced. Lamentable results follow and instead of doing good we dis-edify.

If you wish to remain prudent in your relationships with people in the world, then speak of God whenever possible and help them to build an interior life. Long speeches are not necessary for this.

This is the prudence I consider to be suitable for Religious of the Assumption. No-one can be dispensed from trying to work at it by pretending it is too human a virtue. In speaking of it I have remained on the level of faith which belongs just as much to the supernatural as to the natural order.