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The 'Benedicite'¹

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

I believe I have often told you that one of the great means of keeping yourselves in the presence of God and living in the spirit of continual prayer, is to make with true devotion all the little exercises of devotion that you say now and then during the day. Likewise, when you recite the Angelus, think of the mystery of the Incarnation of which it is a commemoration. While coming and going in the corridors, recite some prayers; before entering the parlour, say a Hail Mary and the "Angel of God"² with devotion. When reciting the rosary at one time or another, say it with recollection and devotion.

Today, I should like to talk about the "Benedicite". Many people say it merely to acquit themselves of one more exercise of devotion; yet it is one of the "Offices" of the day. In many Religious Orders it is chanted. It has many lessons to teach. Say it with attention. Read it once in a while when you have the time. How beautiful are its teachings from the viewpoint of poverty. It makes us understand that we receive everything from God; that, if we are filled, it is because God opens His hand to nourish us; therefore, we ought to give Him thanks, as the poor would, who receive all from His bounty and His mercy.

In the morning we say: *All look to you in hope and you feed them with the food of the season*³. This reminds us of what Our Lord says in the Gospel: "The little birds do not sow, nor gather into barns and yet each of them is fed by divine Providence."⁴ There are certain kinds of birds that do not find food that suit them in our country. They are not like the sparrows that feed a little on everything; those others are instructed by divine Providence to fly to better climates to find their food during winter.

We are like those little birds that depend on God; we must consider ourselves as the poor of Jesus Christ, and marvel that He thinks at all of providing for our needs. It is said that when St. Vincent de Paul went to the refectory, he often shed tears while thinking of this: "I do so

¹ Prayer before meals said entirely in Latin. In her commentary, Mother Marie Eugenie quotes Latin verses and sometimes translates them.

² Prayer to the Guardian Angel

³ Ps 145:15

⁴ Cf. Mt 6:26

little for God, I work so little in His house, yet He feeds me with such abundance!” We should try, dear Sisters, to have this profound sentiment of poverty which makes us realise with gratitude that everything comes to us from God, and that we should not rely on ourselves alone to obtain it.

To say the “Benedicite” and Grace with these sentiments is to advance, not only in the spirit of poverty, but also in the spirit of confidence and of hope in God. Poverty and hope are closely linked; poverty strips us of all earthly goods and hope puts all our support in God. It is generally said that to faith corresponds obedience; to hope, poverty; and to charity, chastity, which unites us to God with a close and tender love.

After lunch we say: “All your creatures shall thank You, O Lord”.meditate and see how all creatures receive from God that which is necessary for their subsistence; how, from the last worm of the earth to man, all creatures render thanks, but only through the voice of man; that is why this is added: “And your faithful shall bless you⁵”, those who through baptism are established in sanctity by Your grace.

“He has distributed, He has given to the poor.” These words are said here, without doubt, to give to religious, and also in a general way to Christians, an idea of their relative poverty. “His justice stands firm forever.⁶” What does His justice mean? That He is just, faithful to His promises. He has promised that the creature who confides or trusts in Him will not wait in vain. For centuries and centuries, it has never been known that His mercy has failed those that have prayed to Him. Look at the Order of St. Francis: having no resources, yet it has lived on after many centuries in all countries with such facility that a pleasantry goes about to the effect that St. Francis has never had any worry for his children, because it is God who worries for him. There are thousands of Franciscans, who, possessing nothing in the world, living in houses that belong to the Bishop, are taken care of by God as He does for the sparrows.

We have never heard of a Franciscan who has died of hunger, for God has always provided for him. There are poor people who die of hunger; is it because they do not ask God for their daily bread? Is it to condemn certain Orders which flourish in great cities? I do not know; but I know that never was it said that a Franciscan has died of hunger; their Order has existed for centuries and has expanded into even abandoned places below the equator, and in the small republics of America.

“I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips.⁷” it is good to bless God for the care He gives us from the natural point of view; we cannot live without it; but we must remember that He takes care of us also from the spiritual point of view; thus, we should always hope that in all places, and at all times, in every way He will give us the necessary means for attaining our end. Here is an act of the virtue of hope. We hope in God for eternal salvation because of the merits of Jesus Christ; and to all the acts of hope, is added: that the means of arriving at them are grace and the observance of the commandments.

Never should hope waver on this point; it is one of the virtues recommended. For the soul is not holy unless it is founded on faith, hope, and charity. Hope is no less than faith. Charity surpasses both, because it stays on to eternity; but hope should lead us to everlasting life, where charity never perishes.

⁵ Ps 145 :10

⁶ Ps 112 :9

⁷ Ps 34 :1

“Let the humble hear and rejoice.⁸” These are mysterious words. All gentle souls hear Him and rejoice; they walk the way of the Lord, confide in Him, throw upon Him all their anxieties.

“Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord.⁹” May those who hear how the religious are well treated by Providence, join those who always praise, bless and glorify the Lord: to praise, to bless, and to glorify Him all together.

After that comes the prayer: Grant us, we beg you, Lord... We ask that all who do us good receive life eternal. It is a just prayer. In one way or another, there are people that have contributed to our temporal well-being and we should never leave the refectory without praying for them, our benefactors. The Church also, wants us to do so.

When you take care of almsgiving, Sisters, or when you look for alms, at least some of you, to provide for some religious or poor scholars think always that in exchange for the alms you give, life eternal will be given you, much more so when you do this in behalf of the priests of God. Our Lord has said it expressly in the Gospel: “He who receives an Apostle, who gives hospitality to an Apostle, has a reward greater than he who receives any other creature¹⁰”. Nevertheless Our Lord has said that He will consider that which is done for the least of His creatures as done to Him¹¹. Think of how they will receive a full reward, those who occupy themselves in doing good to the Apostles¹². Our Lord again said: may your peace descend on this house.

See what lessons are found in the prayers of the Benedicite. I only take those of the morning. Take for another time those of the evening and meditate upon them, and you will find it easier to recollect yourselves when you recite this prayer.

I also tell you to do the same thing for all the little prayers of the day. Reckon the number of times that these will put you in the presence of God, and you will find that it is more than 30 times during the day that you will be placed in the spirit of prayer outside your religious exercises. You understand what advantage this will be for the advancement of your interior life, of which we talked last time.

There are people who hope, as St. Francis de Sales says, that perfection will be placed upon their shoulders like ready-made clothing, so that they will have a continual feeling of the presence of God; that they will have only to lift their eyes to heaven to see God; that they don't have to give themselves this trouble and that it will come by itself.

I often repeat to you this dialogue between two saints. St. Jane de Chantal asked St. Francis de Sales if he needed to put himself in the presence of God. St. Francis answered: “By the great goodness of my God, I do not find it hard to do so; nevertheless, I try to recall it every quarter of an hour.” There was effort on the part of St. Francis to put himself in the presence of God. St. Jane de Chantal added that that was easy for him, because he was always well aware of God.

For St. Jane de Chantal, it was not that easy. She had suffering, darkness and difficulties. She

⁸ Ps 34 :2

⁹ Ps 34 :3

¹⁰ Cf. Mt 10:40-42

¹¹ Mt 25 :40

¹² Cf. Mt 10:12-13

once said that in a day, she had light only for the space of a Hail Mary. She was a great saint but many times during the day she was tempted against faith, so that she felt God's light only for the space of a Hail Mary; it is a very short period. In view of this darkness, of her sufferings, she did what St. Francis de Sales taught her: she made the effort to place herself in the presence of God often. It is said in her life, that she made with great fervour all the little practices of devotion; this means that she kept herself united to God by renewing her attention and her effort, so that she became such an interior soul that at the end of her life, she was always absorbed in God.

