



December 15, 1878

The Incarnation, Mystery of Holiness

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

I would like to share with you some thoughts on the mysteries of this season. From this moment, and until Christmastime, we adore Our Lord, in His annihilation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.

This great mystery of the Incarnation, the Salvation of the world, the Principle of supernatural life, which, according to the thought of a Saint recently proclaimed a Doctor of the Church, gave life to the world even without the Fall, and the only mystery that can give life to the world after the Fall—this great mystery, encounters unbelief and contradiction in every all-too-human mind. First among the ungodly, and then even among Christians: if the spirit of the world happens to prevail, then the question arises. People ask: “How can this be?”

The mystery of this great mystery is that it is a mystery of holiness. What scandalizes worldly people is seeing Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, so profoundly humbled: seeing the Almighty, the Eternal One, the One who created heaven and earth, the One Who is to come and judge the nations, reduced to so little in the womb of a poor, unknown virgin, first in Nazareth, then in Bethlehem. The explanation for this mystery is that, above all else, God places His holiness. Holiness is what He seeks above all else. What He desires is to create saints.

People reason as if God intended to create a kingdom or a doctrine, and not as if He intended to create saints. It is saints whom God chose to make through the Mystery of the Incarnation. First, consider how He descended into the womb of the Blessed Virgin, because she was absolutely holy. What the world will never understand is that the greatest attraction that can draw God to this earth is holiness. In the whole world, there was nothing like this fifteen-year-old girl, because she was the holiest thing on earth.

By descending in this way, Jesus Christ wanted to open for us the path to holiness. It is for us that He came down from heaven. For us, for those who first were to bear the fruits of the Redemption with that loftiness, that perfection, that grandeur which made the saints, saints like Saint Francis of Assisi, like the Apostles, like the thousands we have in the Catholic Church.

The first sentiment, therefore, the first love that drew Jesus Christ to earth, was holiness. Saints could only be created in that self-emptying embrace of Our Lord in His Incarnation. Therein lies the root of all holiness. Therein lies the principle of renouncing all earthly things and of self-annihilation in order to live from God, according to God, in the will of God. Read all the lives of the Saints: you will always find that they completely renounced themselves, that they entered into the self-emptying embrace of humility, poverty, and obedience. They profoundly despised themselves, and giving all their love to God, they sought every virtue in what our Lord had shown them, by making Himself so small in the womb of the Most Holy Virgin.

But after the saints, there are no saved Christians except those who, to some extent, participate in that spirit of self-annihilation which is essential to holiness.

How can we be surprised, Sisters, that worldly people do not understand this? How can we be surprised that so many distracted, frivolous people cannot grasp a mystery as profound as the annihilation of God, which must result in the most profound annihilation of creatures before God and union with that life which Our Lord Jesus Christ chose to accept in the womb of the Most Holy Virgin?

It was undoubtedly a life of consolation, since He found the holiest creature in the world, the most perfect, the most angelic—rather, the most exalted far above the angels, the saints, all creatures. She surpassed the graces of everyone, had her origins in the perfection of the saints, and soared almost to the throne of God, at least as close as any creature can approach that throne.

This is the one in whom Jesus Christ found such immense consolation. He accepted this life of absolute silence, obedience, captivity, and utter self-annihilation—He who was perfect in body, perfect in soul, perfect in mind! This is something religious should meditate on deeply, to see within themselves the things in which they must annihilate themselves!

There are many things within us that we must renounce, many things in which we still live: our desires, our pride, those thousand little attachments that are the baggage of the self. And if, as these great feasts approach, Our Lord Jesus Christ invites us on the one hand to rejoice, because He brings us forgiveness, peace, grace, holiness, on the other hand, to receive these graces, He calls us to enter into the same path that He followed, that is to say into annihilation, into the deepest renunciation of self, in order to participate in His holiness.

No one knows to what degree of self-emptying God has attached holiness for her, to what depths He has hidden it in each of them. To what extent is the grace of holiness for you, Sister? You do not know, nor do I. But if you are faithful, if you give yourself to Our Lord Jesus Christ to follow Him in His self-emptying, these graces will come upon you; and, as it is in the nature of grace that each grace received draws forth another and doubles it, it depends on you to let that grace marvelously multiply in your soul.

Thus God sends you a small light; you see what you must relinquish. You do so, by your will, by an act, by a generous acceptance: this grace doubles, returns, and asks for two more things, to which you respond equally. It is no longer two graces, but four graces that you receive, then eight, then sixteen. If grace multiplies, say the ancient theologians, it is not by one, two, three, four, five, but by two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two.

How greatly it depends on you to receive abundant graces! Throughout the day, God offers graces to the religious soul. Every act of humility, perfection, obedience, and prayer draws them to us. All the sacraments bestow them upon us. If the soul is faithful in responding to these graces, those of the following day will be more numerous, greater, and more merciful, and those of the day after that even greater.

This was the case for the Blessed Virgin: not a single grace was lost to her from the day of her Immaculate Conception. The mind is overwhelmed by this abyss of perfection, and words fail. There was not a single grace to which she did not respond, and she received immense ones. With all these graces multiplying and quadrupling, who can measure the abyss of grace and holiness in the soul of the Blessed Virgin?

If the Blessed Virgin's first graces, such as her Immaculate Conception, were so great, what can be said of the grace of the Incarnation? At the end of her life, Mary was called to offer with Jesus Christ the sacrifice of Calvary. There she was a priest with Him. There she became the Mother of humankind: a

most sorrowful grace, no doubt, but grace is not always consoling; it is often accompanied by anguish and suffering.

The Blessed Virgin neglected no grace: in joy as in sorrow, she never let slip a single portion of God's gift. Thus, from grace to grace, she ascended to that throne of glory where she is the object of the admiration of all the angels and all the saints. At the same time, she is before God the humblest, the most faithful, and the most submissive daughter!

Following her example, Sisters, you too are called to create a throne for yourselves, always taking self-emptying as your starting point. And note that in heaven the Blessed Virgin is always humble, submissive, the perfect servant of God, while at the same time being His spouse and the queen of all creatures.

It would be utter folly to believe that humility and self-emptying cease in heaven. Only in heaven is humility, joy and self-emptying fullness, because God finds more space where there is less of the creature. The more a saint loves, the emptier of self they become; and heaven is the place of perfect love, where saints attain the fullness of the love begun on earth. Of all places, then, it is the one where one is emptiest of self. It is a sad fullness, this self-emptying; it is the one that leads down to hell. It is she who, if she avoids hell, needs to be purified in the fires of purgatory; for nothing defiled can remain before God.

If these thoughts help you, Sisters, to absorb something of the self-emptying of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to surrender yourselves only to God, then this Advent will have been truly sanctifying for you. When you find yourselves facing the objections of the world, facing the blasphemies of unbelievers, tell yourselves that the mystery of God is a mystery of holiness, and that they cannot comprehend it. Above all, God gave His Son to the world to make saints, and, after the great saints, people who share in holiness.

Many Christians do not understand this. I am not saying that they will not reach heaven. It will be like children who die after baptism, as a result of the fullness of the Sacraments. They arrive at a small place, where God bestows a few rays of light upon them. But they do not fulfill all of God's designs; they are not all that God would have wanted from a chosen people, to whom He had given so much.

How much less should this happen to souls who bear the name of Religious! A Religious means full of devotion to God. Brides of the Son of God, they are not merely bound to Him by ordinary ties, but by holy, special, chosen bonds. In them, holiness must grow and be strengthened daily, establishing itself on the foundations of the self-emptying of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the mysteries we now celebrate.