

THE SPIRIT OF THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

13th July 1879

My dear daughters,

We do not often speak about the Rule of St. Augustine. Father Picard has found a good commentary done by the Augustinians. I hope we will obtain a copy so that we may learn how the Augustinian Order interprets the Rule.

Whilst awaiting this, I fell upon a phrase of St. Dominic that I will share with you today. When his religious asked him what was the spirit of the Rule of St. Augustine, he answered that **the characteristic of this Rule is a spirit of divine charity, of humility, poverty of spirit and of heart.** This is very well said. The Saints see clearly and express clearly what they see.

If you have been attentive, you will have seen that the love of God fills the Rule of St. Augustine, as in general it fills all his works. *“Before all else, let God be loved and then the neighbor.”* This introduction, it seems does not form part of the notes the saint sent to the religious of Hippo; but it is an extract from his works and resumes the thought of the Rule most aptly. *“Before all else that God be loved and then the neighbor, for these are the chief commandments given us.”*

If you examine the whole Rule, you will find that both humility that we mentioned above and detachment which springs from poverty, are mentioned everywhere. *“Let your heart be on the things above. Do not seek the vain things of the earth; seek above all, the love of God and of the neighbor.”*

As one reads the Rule it is easy to see the spirit of divine charity, of ardent love for God which is the predominant characteristic. When it

is read on Sunday in the refectory, listen to it, from the point of view of supernatural charity, of the love of God to which all our affections are given, and the love for our neighbor which results from this.

If a Rule has a very marked characteristic, is it not fitting that those who follow this Rule should possess it also? You say, “We are daughters of St. Augustine, we follow his Rule.” Is it not fitting that you should have this very marked characteristic of the love of God and the neighbor, and that you rise above the mundane things here below, and go ever higher, “*leaving below things that pass away*” as the Rule says, “*and becoming attached to everlasting charity.*” When the heart is on things above, the vain things of the earth are ignored, and this is primarily the spirit of the Assumption.

The second characteristic is humility; perhaps you will not notice that so quickly. Another Sunday, listen to the Rule from the point of view of humility, which is so recommended for you. You will see that St. Augustine insists that we should be careful that pride does not make us lose the merit of our good works, that one should not seek a vain esteem, a useless occupation with self, a vain recollection of all one has done for the Congregation. “*They should consider themselves superior in having given their goods to the monastery.*” When he says 'goods' he means spiritual as well as material goods.

I remember having heard someone, not here, but in another congregation that you do not know, “But I have done so much for the Congregation, I have worked so hard for this house, that one should be most grateful to me, one should be thankful for all I have done for the temporal and spiritual life in the boarding school.” For all these good things, St Augustine says, “*Let them not become prouder of their riches for having given them to the monastery, than if they had enjoyed them in the world. For all other evil is produced only in evil works, but pride attaches itself to good works to ruin them.*”

Humility is emphasized in the Rule by the simplicity with which St. Augustine presumes that correction of faults will always be accepted. It is a great act of humility to accept correction. It is more difficult than not to be proud of this and say, "I have given all my worldly goods. I am the foundress." I have heard a poor sick sister say this; for one must be really ill to speak thus. It is even worse to say, "I have given my time, my work, I have done this and that." This is worse and it is easy to avoid these two points.

But it is harder when she is in fault, to accept correction, even to be 'punished,' as the Rule says, to accept gladly, simply, and humbly that one may have made a mistake, even if we do not really think so. Everyone sees faults in you; pride makes you think that everyone is mistaken, that they are unjust, that in fact you possess just the opposite virtue. St. Augustine does not discuss this way of thinking; he does not even appear to think it possible. He speaks quite simply of the correction of faults by the superior, helped by other Sisters "*to root out the evil before it becomes serious.*" He speaks as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world; so simple and natural that should someone refuse the penitence given, he saw no other remedy than to give the person her liberty "*lest, by a harmful contagion, she be the cause of the loss of other Sisters.*"

There is another humility recommended in the Rule, that of obedience: "*One should obey the superior as to a mother, keeping the honor, which is her due*" Note that he mentions all superiors without exception. Then, as a footnote, he advocates for the superior the humility of command. If she notes that she has said something not pleasing to God, if she has corrected someone too sharply, "*Let her ask pardon of the Lord who knows how dearly she loves the one whom perhaps she has corrected too sharply.*" But he leaves the one corrected in no doubt, but that she must accept, in obedience, thus keeping the honor due to the superior.

Let us examine third point that St. Dominic had remarked, poverty of spirit and heart. On yes, another Sunday, listen to the Rule from this point of view and you will see how everything should be in common. One should be attached to nothing, one should not complain if given clothes someone else has worn: veil, habit, guimpe; provided that one has all that is necessary and one is clothed, that is all that is needed. *“Learn from this how lacking you are of holy habits of the heart, if you complain about the habits of the body.”*

St. Augustine considered this practice of poverty so important that he would have liked the priests at Hippo to make the vow of poverty and common life. He found that the heart attached to earthly good falls so low that he would also have liked even simple priests to make the vow of common life.

This is the thought of St. Dominic, this great Religious who practiced the Rule of St. Augustine all his life and who after being a Canon Regular, become the founder of the Dominicans, so as to be able to practice the works of zeal that did not lie in at the works of the Canons. If that is indeed the spirit of the Rule, how important it is that we should have this triple spirit and that we try to be true daughters of this Rule.

You will have heard that different Rules have their particular spirit, a predominating spirit. It is poverty in St. Francis' Rule, If you examine St. Benedict's rule, you'll see that double characteristic is the spirit of silence and the spirit of divine praise. The love for the office, for Divine Liturgy is evident among the Benedictines. As soon as one meets them, one realises that they are peace-loving men. Fr. Beste, who was educated by them, said that they were calm men. Peace is written everywhere in Benedictine monasteries. As for the love of the Divine Office, if one meets Benedictine, the first thing

one learns from him, is ancient tradition, the service rendered by the Divine Office. Dom Pitra, for example, knows all the hymns sung all over the world, in Greece and in the Eastern countries. Their spirit, their heart, and their thoughts are there. That is how they become true Religious of their Order.

If the triple characteristic of the Rule of St. Augustine is divine charity, and fraternal charity founded on divine charity, humility and poverty of heart and mind, we must make an effort so that people who know us, recognize this spirit in us. If it is recognized, then we are good Religious and St. Augustine will count us among his true daughters.

St. Augustine is very generous towards his children. I know of Sisters who obtain great graces when they ask him for them, especially graces of peace, charity, patience, and the allaying of faults which were evident for a long time. When old faults disappear, when a difficult character becomes transformed through devotion to St. Augustine, even if this be in the last years of someone's life, it is an immense grace. I do not know anything greater.

Be daughters of St. Augustine and ask him for these three virtues which are the characteristics of his Rule.