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WATCHFULNESS OVER ONE'S HEART

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

I spoke to you last time of watchfulness over one's looks and words; but you understand well that the exterior expresses what is going within. Each one of us knows how to say: that person, in her exterior, manifests pride, softness; she has a haughty look, an air of indolence. The exterior manifests what is in the heart and the words do it much more still, for Our Lord said: "A good man draws good things from his store of goodness." (Mt. 12: 35)

The Rule of St. Augustine tells us: "Do not say that your intention is pure if your exterior is not modest," that is to say, that the attitude is regulated by the heart, by the thoughts, the sentiments, by all that comprises the interior man. In this way, let a religious of the Assumption always bear herself with modesty, frankness, goodwill, humility, recollection, because in the interior of her heart, all is regulated, all is given to God, all is in conformity with the Gospel and with the different virtues which are recommended to us by our Rule.

From the custody of the eyes and of the lips, we must then come to the custody of the heart. It seems to me that it is absolutely necessary to remember, in the order of faith, the importance of the heart of man to the eyes of God Who possesses all perfection, or who in the unity of his nature and in the Trinity of Persons in whom it subsists, from all eternity the plenitude of knowledge and love, of happiness and joy. Why is God in need of man's heart and why does he attach so much importance to what goes on in it? In order to solve this question, it is necessary to recall what faith teaches us.

God was in His glory, in that eternity which has neither succession nor end, when it pleased Him to create. First, He created time and space, then He formed this earth little by little as the home of man. He covered it with plants and trees, He adorned it with magnificence; He placed fish in the sea and birds in the air, and all for man. When He had made all these things, He formed a unique creature, different from all the others, because He made it to His image and likeness: this creature is man. He has given him -- what was not given to any other creature -- the power to know Him, to love Him, and consequently, to serve Him.

It seems that the animals have a certain power to love; but notice that they attach themselves always to what they see, to what they touch, to persons from whom they receive certain benefits and with whom they come in contact. Man, on the contrary, has been endowed with an intellectual faculty, by the aid of which he can know what he does not see, he can love, attach himself intensely to one from whom he has not received anything. I do not say this with regard to God, because we have received all from Him. But man is capable of being enthusiastic for what he has not seen, and this is a purely intellectual power.

We have the power to love what we know intellectually: that is why we can love God by a purely intellectual knowledge, and can love Him without seeing Him. We certainly see a reflection of God, a reflection of His goodness, of His love in all creatures; we receive from Him through them all that is a help to our life, to our needs; but if God has put at our service all that He has made on earth, it is not in

order that we may attach ourselves to the earthly creatures which are a help to us; it is in order that from them, we may lift ourselves towards Him. God made them such that we may see in them, with the intellectual power He has given us, His love, His gifts, a very imperfect image of Him, and that from all things, we could rise up to Him.

A child whose parents had taught from childhood to say always: “Thank You, my God” for all that she received, whether it was a toy, a piece of bread, a dress, a fruit, because she saw the hand of God through the hand of her parents, had been brought up well. That is what we ought to do always. Intellectual knowledge gives us the means to rise from all things to God, and to affirm that all we receive comes to us from God.

When God created man, He endowed him with the faculties which established in him all the perfections of his natural being. He added grace to these gifts of nature. Then man could know God not only through created beings but also through grace. God was known and loved because He dwelt in the heart of man.

In order to be so known and loved, God had established a kind of relation which made man like a child of God, which united him to God, which gave him something like a ray from his own light. This grace was lost. Since then, every creature born on earth found himself descended to an inferior state, to a state of sin; he needed two things in order to be saved. First, he had to preserve the remembrance of the time when he had known God and thereby render Him homage. Secondly, that he have faith in the promised Redeemer, through whom alone he was to be saved, and that with this faith and this love, he did good works on earth.

God in His goodness has deigned, in the Old Testament, to save those who had preserved something of the thought, of the knowledge of God, of faith and hope in the promised Redeemer. This is the secret of God. In the Garden of Eden, God spoke with His creature, and on earth, He gave him knowledge of an eternal, all-powerful God, knowledge that we find distorted in paganism. Therefore, God had wanted His creature to love Him. “God’s heart was grieved” say the Scriptures (Gen. 6: 6) when His creature gave himself over entirely to sin. Then He wanted to wipe him from the earth, since he had not held his heart in what was good, in integrity, in justice. He sent the deluge in order to destroy all flesh. He must have attached much importance to the love of His creature since He struck him so grievously, so severely when His ungrateful creature despised His love.

The heart of God therefore desired the heart of man. God made the heart of man capable of loving Him and He expects from him, a love which ought to be one of the accidental glories of the divinity, and to which the heart of God attaches a great importance.

I would like to draw from this what concerns us. What I have said is but a prelude to what I have to say. St. Ignatius does this too. What he wants to talk of sin, he takes sin in general, he shows the punishment for the first sin, for the sin of the Angels, and then all the punishments which have struck those who sin.

I will say the same for the love of God. It is important for us to see that God, having done all He could to win the heart of man, is afflicted with a great sorrow, when the heart of man turns away from Him. You will thus understand well that God watches over you and at each moment His gaze is fixed on your heart. He gazes at each one of you individually, He considers what you do with this faculty of knowledge and love that He has placed in you; what intellectual effort you make to conceive of this perfect, eternal, sovereign, infinitely good God, whose perfections are His essence, whose goodness is His essence, whose beauty is His essence; He observes how you seek to love Him above all things. It

is necessary then not to waste a single moment. This is the only thought with which I will leave you today.

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