

## **Zeal for Perfection**

15th September 1872

My dear Daughters,

These two feasts (The Exaltation of the Cross & Our Lady of Sorrows) give us a precious lesson: the Blessed Virgin carried her cross from the beginning of her life and, until the end, she felt in her heart all the pains of Jesus in a deep and intimate way. What can we conclude from this? That in the religious life we too have to carry the cross of each day. Our Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow Me"<sup>1</sup> and St. Teresa said somewhere that it is amusing when a religious does not want to have any cross since she came to the convent precisely to follow Jesus Crucified.

Unfortunately, there are persons who instead of profiting from crosses, are only irritated by them; or worse still, the trials that Our Lord sends them, produce another feeling - disillusionment. Each one of you should examine herself on this point and see if the crosses in your life have not produced this feeling.

There is nothing more harmful. Our love for Our Lord, our fidelity, the spirit of prayer, of fervour, cannot survive with this disposition. It is one of the great dangers in the religious life and carries with it egoism, scandal,

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 16:24

pharisaism. When I say pharisaism, I mean the inclination to be troubled at the imperfections of our sisters. Let us discard this disposition recognizing ourselves, as St. Francis of Sales said, as capable of the defects of others. Let us understand that we can fall. Let the spirit of zeal, of charity take the place of this human spirit of which I speak. This would be a very good disposition after a retreat, one of the best means of proving our love for Our Lord.

Contemplate the Blessed Virgin during the Passion of her divine Son. She sees the Apostles, who certainly must have formed the most perfect community that could have existed, disperse and abandon their Master immediately after their first Communion. She sees the treason of Judas, the denial of Peter. It is true that St. John remains at the foot of the cross, but he is the only one.

Is the Blessed Virgin disillusioned? Does she say: "What will happen? Where is the College of Apostles?" How many failures, how many imperfections did she find in these men taught for three years by Jesus Christ himself! No, the Blessed Virgin does not speak thus. She bears all in silence, with faith, with patience, without being discouraged; for throughout her life she practiced virtue in this manner, going from grace to grace, from fidelity to greater fidelity.

Do not think, Sisters, that I am asking this perfection of the Blessed Virgin of you. We are in entirely different situations. The Blessed Virgin has never had a shadow of

an imperfection... we have been conceived in sin, we have in us many evil inclinations which the Blessed Virgin did not have; but we ought to overcome them. And we must expect to see imperfections in others. We have some, our sisters also, and it will be thus as long as we live.

Let us enter into the dispositions of the Blessed Virgin in this respect. She united herself to the Heart of her divine Son and was grieved upon seeing it offended. Our imperfections grieve our Lord. He loves us with a jealous love and His Heart is wounded by our imperfections. Unite yourselves to these sentiments. Then you have the example of the saints who found themselves in the same conditions as you and who, like you, had to conquer their own nature.

Take Blessed Père Fournier, for example, who lived in the midst of a very lax community and among men who made him suffer cruelly. See how he sanctified himself in bearing with them. Everyone knows the story of St. Benedict and the first community that he directed. We know how these religious, who were not at all regular, were annoyed at seeing, in the fervour of St. Benedict, a condemnation of their lax life and wanted to poison him. They still show the remains of the cup that was broken when the Saint made the sign of the cross on the drink that it contained.

The imperfections of our sisters are nothing of that kind. But there will be one thing or another; and when you

see some imperfection, try to avoid it yourself. This is about all you can do in such circumstances. Think that your sister is tempted, that, if you had had a similar temptation, you perhaps would not have been able to conquer it, that she is much more unhappy than you. Pray for her, make every effort in order to console the Heart of Our Lord grieved by this infidelity.

It is thus, without any illusions, - because sometimes it is impossible not to see things - that charity is preserved and that we can practice humility, patience, zeal. Bring this thought to the houses to which you will soon be going, Sisters, and profit of the imperfections that you will see to apply yourself with greater care to your own perfection.

I once told a Superior of the Visitation what I had noticed in several of their convents that seemed to me the most necessary thing in the religious life - the union of the greatest tolerance possible for the imperfection of others, combined with the greatest zeal possible for one's own perfection. I believe that she would have willingly embraced me, so happy was she that I had this opinion of the Visitation and that our ideas in this respect were so close. So then, Sisters, try to adopt this practice: the greatest understanding for the imperfection of your neighbour and the greatest zeal for your perfection.

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