



Session on

« THE FAITH OF MARIE EUGENIE

TODAY »

Auteuil – July 1980

Session on:

“THE FAITH OF MARIE EUGENIE TODAY”

Auteuil, July 1980

Schemas of Conferences

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S. Asuncion

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OPENING

M. H el ene Marie

Session: “THE FAITH OF MARIE EUGENIE TODAY”

Bonjour! Good morning! Buenos Dias!
It is a joy to welcome you this morning!

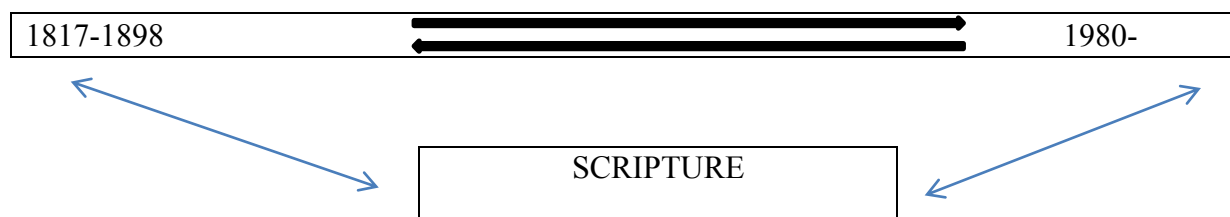
WHERE TO SITUATE THE SESSION?

In the history of our Congregation, at a precise moment. At the Plenary General Council of October, 1979, we received a call to “give a coherent response capable of challenging the world with our Faith”, “to lead a combat”, “a daily struggle” so as “to believe”; in other words, to lose our life in order to receive it from Another. We saw that Marie Eug enie had engaged in the same combat: “I hold my Faith as to something I have discovered” and that she had to be present to us in our Interior Journey. (Text of Plenary General Council, 28th October, 1979). Thus was born the desire to search for a modern expression of the FAITH of Marie Eug enie.

From there, we undertook a study of the Charism and the Rule of Life, making constant reference to the basis of what makes us actually live today. It is therefore in view of the Chapter of 1982 that we situate this session, contemplating the source, watching the spring flow forth from it, and deliberately allowing ourselves to be carried along by the great river that it has become today.

WHAT WILL THE SESSION BE? WHAT IS ITS AIM?

The title tells us: we are going to explore the faith of Marie Eug enie as she expressed it, and seek how to live and express it ourselves. We are going to take the texts of our Foundress where we will see the first intervention of God; we will try to understand the basic thought of Marie Eug enie, to see how her faith evolved; then we are going to “dig into” the Scriptures, the “raw” Word of God; and, in a third phase, go back to the texts of Marie Eug enie and see how we can express them in today’s language; we will see how a way of Faith is able to cross the confines of different cultures. A going back-and-forth between these different times will be required as is illustrated by the arrows in this diagram:



Or, to put it another way, we will ask ourselves three things:

- What is actually written?
- What do you read there?
- How would you say it today?

This translation into Post-Conciliar Theology and today's language is important for us and for the Kingdom. We have to make a constant effort to go forward on our way, to leave the known and journey towards new expressions. Or to continue our metaphor: «The river has become too broad for us to keep a foot on each bank, «we are thus driven to launch our boat on the river, but with full consciousness of our starting point as well as of the place where the Spirit leads us. Such is the route we have to take. This explanation might seem a bit complicated; the reality is more simple: the Faith of Marie Eugénie, cutting across the decades, is going to call ours into question; no longer will we be able to use the excuse that our problem is the epoch or the style; we will be confronted with the way of Faith of one who precedes us into the Church of the Blessed.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SESSION? ITS LIMITS?

The Session is not going to be able to deepen every aspect of the Charism of the Assumption as found in its Foundress, as much as we would like. For example, her social vision, her philosophy of education, and other questions, cannot be dealt with here, in detail. So if we expect that, we will be disappointed. Let us return to the title: “The Faith of Marie Eugénie Today”. It is her Faith, her relationship with God, her spirituality that we are going to try to go deep into, what she lived and what she taught. Indeed, the spiritual experience of a Foundress is at the root of the charism of the Congregation. It is for this reason that we will use for our principal base her chapters of 1878 on “The Spirit of the Assumption”. at the age of 60, Marie Eugénie firmly expressed her faith which had become for the Foundress the spirit, the spirituality, the breath of her Congregation, so much so that when she expresses the charism, she is at the same time expressing her own faith.

Neither will the Session be – at least will not only be- a delightful moment of “savouring” our charism; it will be in part a study, a translation, a work, as we have seen above.

MEANS FOR REACHING THE END

- There will be two “poles” of work:
 - Work from the intelligence:
Reflection, debates, study, analysis, confrontation, sharing, assemblies, group discussions, meetings.
 - Work for the heart
Interiorization, personalization, prayer, silence and solitude, contemplation, adoration.

We will return to this later.

- The program, the agenda of the Session will lead us to the end.
 - The faith of Marie Eugénie...my faith...?
 - The meaning of God for Marie Eugénie, the rights of God.
 - Jesus Christ.
 - Jesus for Marie Eugénie: to know Him, to imitate Him, to be united to Him.
 - The Paschal Mystery.
 - The Kingdom.

- The Church.
 - The Blessed Virgin.
 - And again: the Assumption and the Faith.
- The Attitude required

This is the most important point.

- It is important that we approach this session with “a large idea”, as Marie Eugénie said, with great desire like a pauper seeking God, seeking joy (why not?), without fear and without hesitation, with great generosity: «Here I am, Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3,11).
- To be “sincere”, as Marie Eugénie loved to say; to be true; I put away my masks and make myself vulnerable. I close my umbrella and let myself soak in all that comes...; I am a disciple, Son... and already in a state of conversion, of turning round...
- To accept that I am a sister of Marie Eugénie and have an experience to share with others. I know her in a unique way, my own way, and humbly, just as I listen to the others, I also say what I have to say.
- To try to be relaxed, flexible enough to go forward; not to try to solve our problems because that is God’s affair. Not to take ourselves too seriously, thinking we have to do everything. Let the Spirit speak. Don’t try to understand everything, to keep everything in mind; be content to take what suits me, what is going to fall like rain on arid land, and let the rest fall.
- Finally, above all, to steep ourselves in prayer. To rest in His love. To expose our hearts to God, to live completely with Him these days. To adore. To beg Jesus to increase our Faith and to know how to express it today.

S. Clare Teresa

July 5, 1980

FAITH WITH MERE MARIE EUGENIE

Today I have been asked to speak on the faith of Marie Eugénie. But this is to be the topic of the whole session. And so, I find I have to carve out a kind of introduction to all that we will be considering in detail these fifteen days. I propose to consider:

- I- What faith consists in and the scope of our subject.
- II- How Marie Eugénie acquired her faith and how that faith ripened at the beginning of her religious life.
- III- To study one of Marie Eugénie's texts with you.
- IV- Show how for us today, it illuminates some of the elements of our charism.

I- SOME NOTES ON FAITH...

Faith is a concept which is not easy to define (or to live, either!). Thus, in the Bible, faith is not defined. The same word in different contexts and languages has different meanings. The words used mean: "confidence or security" or "solidity – assurance". Faith also means "fidelity" – the fidelity of a whole people and of certain individuals to the God of the Covenant in answer to His fidelity. It is essentially a personal relationship. For the Bible, Faith is the source of all religious life. Essentially, it has two poles: the relation with a "faithful" person which commits the whole man; on the other hand, an exercise of the intelligence to which a word or some signs allow access to realities which are not seen. (In both cases, man realizes himself by transcending himself.)

Biblical Faith also implies obedience (listening) and acknowledgement. The basis of Israel's faith is the marvels that God has done for him.

Jesus requires Faith in Himself. (He requires us to recognise the signs and the activity that announces a new epoch inaugurated in His Person) and He also requires that we follow Him. Faith expresses itself by conversion, a change of heart; by which we expect from God what we used to believe was impossible. Faith in Jesus is confidence, hope, loyalty. It is also believing in the truth of what He announces, affirming it.

This truth, His message, Jesus entrusted to witnesses, to His Apostles, to His Church. To believe, after the Resurrection, was first, to accept the preaching of these witnesses, the Gospel, the Word. This initial message, transmitted as a tradition, was clarified and developed as a teaching.

Faith enlightens the intelligence of him who believes in the Wisdom, and in the knowledge of Christ and His love. It effects salvation, deploys itself in activity and acts in fraternal love. It blossoms in obedience and trust. It remains faithful and is capable of facing death in absolute trust.

God Himself is the object of our Faith. What He communicates by His revelation is not something intellectual, but Himself, the knowledge of a person. The God Who reveals Himself, touches the being of man in all its dimensions. The whole person and the whole of life are taken up in the relationship with God who communicates Himself. The flowering of the Faith is in Love because God reveals Himself as He Who loves and as the finality, the End of all existence.

You can see that this question of Faith cannot be summarized in a few words!

For our study today- and all the following days- I propose this plan or outline:

How did Marie Eugénie's faith enable her to:

- understand the conditions of human life and answer the ultimate questions of existence.
- commit herself with fidelity and trust in a way that was coherent with her understanding.
- enter into relationship with others and with the world.

II- A WAY OPENS OUT FOR US...

We are much more influenced by our families than we realize. A vocation, I think, is prepared generations ahead. M. Marie Eugénie speaks of her first education in which "Christ had no part". But the motto of the family was: "Nothing without faith" and I think that faith had its sources very far back. In the Bible, we read that God will visit the sins of parents on the children unto four generations, but the good that they have wrought will affect thousands and thousands of generations: who knows what blessings were inherited from her family? Anne Eugénie adored her mother who was not a practising Catholic, however we do not know whether or not she was a believer (1). In any case, she had her child baptized and when Anne Eugénie made her first communion it brought her a grace which fixed the direction of her whole life. Besides, we know that the whole of Anne Eugénie's education at home was marked by traditional Christian values.

However, she lacked not only a climate of Faith which makes God the center and the constant point of reference but also the warmth of affection and trust by which parents bear witness to the tenderness of God – between each other and with Anne Eugénie.

Besides, between the ages of 12 and 19, Anne Eugénie lost the security of a united family, a fortune, her mother, and her faith went into eclipse. She suffered all the anguish and the questioning of adolescence and above all experienced solitude. She found herself alone on the emotional and intellectual levels; alone with her metaphysical ideas, her moral questioning, along with an acute sense of her own limits.

But God was seeking her – even more than she sought Him. He presented Himself as a Question, imposed Himself; and this was already a presence, a revelation – He attracted her, protected her, prepared her...

The effect of all her thinking and her questioning was to make God the Center of Anne Eugénie's concerns. She prayed in spite of herself, felt drawn to the Blessed Sacrament. And one day, she found herself at Notre Dame to hear the young Father Lacordaire. "To have faith, we have to want it, and we have to pray" he said. "O You, Whoever You are, You Who made us, deign to draw me out of my doubt and wretchedness". (O.I, 48)

For Anne Eugénie, his words were decisive. (2)

With a fairly extensive and stimulating intellectual education, she lacked an education in the Faith at the same level. Her mother's manner of thinking and that of "two men", she was to tell us later, had a profound influence on her – especially because of their socio-political ideas". But for intellectuals of this type, Christian truth was "outmoded" and the Church, a **force** opposed to liberty. Surely, the catechism used by the good priest who prepared Anne Eugénie for her First Communion must have left God in His Heaven and in the private domain of "souls".

Lacordaire, on the contrary, knew how to address himself not only to the heart but also to the intelligence of the educated Parisians whose Faith was in danger of being shaken, overwhelmed by new political developments, the scientific discoveries and social questions. He spoke to men of a new era and of a God Who was intimately concerned with all that made up their "world"- intellectual, social, political, economic.

For Anne-Eugénie his witness set in motion the great encounter with Jesus Christ and with His Church. She recognised that Truth Himself was addressing His creature: "Hear, O Israel..." (Dt.6). She felt the need to respond with her whole being.

"The first right of God is to be believed when He speaks" (Ch.1878, March 3). Faith transforms. For Anne Eugénie, Faith transforms the universe. (3)

Anne Eugénie now converted turned to God and tried to come to a deeper knowledge of Him- the heart sets the intelligence to work; intelligence enlightens the heart- but Anne Eugénie in her hunger for authenticity needed to go further. Truth is one; we have to achieve an intellectual unity in our outlook. She read, reflected, prayed. She spent her time "trying to complete her intellectual renewal by a study of Christianity" – begun by Lacordaire. (Letter to Lacordaire – 13.12.41). "I hold to the Faith as to something which I discovered", she was to confide in her Personal notes (N° 152- March 1836).

At the age of 20, the young convert seemed astonished by the distance she had travelled. She can no longer give reasons for her Faith; love is stronger than all her reasoning. However, it was impossible for her to evade this intellectual toil. Anne Eugénie recorded the fruit of her search: "Now, when I am led into religious discussions, I can no longer be lucid; I have nothing to answer, I can no longer give any reason for my Faith. Yet, I only reached Faith through intellectual conviction. I argued, I resisted, and if I submitted to the rule of authority, it was because it seemed to me obviously right, I was led to do so by my long arguments, by the chain of my thoughts, to which each day added a new link. It is true that, when I went on from Faith to find love, all these things paled before me..." (N.I.2.-2.161.37)

Through her contacts with Lacordaire, and then her meeting with the Abbé Combalot and later with Fr. d'Alzon, Anne Eugénie was introduced into a circle (predominantly of men) who understood their time and who were full of faith, ardent apostles, witnesses of the love of Christ and of the **power** of the Gospel. From the time of the Lenten sermons at Notre Dame, she believed that the Church alone "had, here below, the secret and the power of Good."

(Letter to Lacordaire – 13.12.41). In her, Anne Eugénie found **together with the certainty** of revelation, all the treasures of tradition – and of renewal: liturgical, theological, monastic, social.

Besides, through them and in them, not only had she encountered the Church, but she had also experienced KOINONIA; these are the friends of Christ, friends in Christ, collaborators for the Kingdom – her family.

Anne Eugénie was to be led to difficult partings. But new links were to be formed. Attachment to God and to His Will – friends and “fathers” (4) – eventually to her sisters, who loved her and encouraged her. We have the impression that Anne Eugénie had never really given herself, had never really revealed herself, before placing herself under “obedience” to Fr. Combalot and later, to Fr. d’Alzon.

Already in 1841, she could write about how the “interior message” of her First Communion”, “which had left such slight traces at the time”, had been realized in her life.

“Today, I see hardly any one whose face I knew in my childhood: family, position, dwelling, everything has changed; I have no mother but Holy Church for which I had so little love in those days; the only ties which have any reality for me are those I have through her.” (Notes Intimes – Retreat, Sept. 1841)

Temperamentally so direct, and single-minded, demanding and passionate, Anne Eugénie does not surprise us when she finds it logical to go on from conversion to Christ, to the thought of the religious life. She wanted to give herself fully and finally. “I have a frighteningly logical mind” she confided in her Notes, on 4.4.38. “I pursue things to their logical conclusion; I can do nothing by halves; with the Faith, I want to live by Faith and everything else chafes me... Besides, I have a need for love which must be satisfied; you are blind, you that never saw this beneath my smiles and my mockery... When I observe myself, I am afraid of the ardour and the energy which I feel in my soul...” (2.161.38)

In the beginning, she was thinking of the salvation of her soul, of a contemplative order. But through the encounter with Abbé Combalot – who saw in her his future Foundress and who spoke to her in the name of God! - her contacts with the “revolutionary” thought of Lacordaire, Montalembert, Lamennais, - the Abbé Combalot... himself- a “pensée de zèle” (an apostolic impulse) came to dominate her and led her to understand that she must really give herself through action – to the work of the Kingdom.

Anne Eugénie dreamt of being “greatly useful” to the Church and to her country by working to spread the Truth of Jesus Christ and giving herself to the “crusade of Faith”. Through the religious life and through education she would be able to share in the Redemption. This follows the logic of her Faith.

There is no need to stop and explain the relation between education and faith. All her work in education had its central purpose to link all knowledge to Faith, to “achieve the reign of Faith over the intelligence”, “Instaurare omnia in Christo” (5).

“We are not aiming at an ambitious academic programme but rather at an education in harmony with and favourable to Faith rather than hostile to it. No doubt, this will entail great effort on our part, since most of the books used in the education of women are completely opposed to this spirit.” (to Lacordaire, 4.2.42)

Faith escapes us and surpasses us. Jesus leads; the disciple follows. He walks behind his Master who leads him always onward. Marie Eugénie like the People of Israel, like the disciples, like us, was to know anxieties, struggles, revolts, disappointments. The consent of her intelligence was not gained once for all. She would always need to reason things out; she was a reflective character who did not accept truth as inert objects of belief, but who set but to assimilate a truth in such a way that it was integrated into her own vision, became a living conviction and transformed her.

Once convinced of something, nothing would stop her, but she had to be convinced. The submission of her intelligence could cost her much when she already had ideas of her own on a subject. But she had the grace both to trust her own intuitions and to accept that she might be mistaken to modify her position – or just simply to wait. Through humility and trust, she put herself in the hands of God, relying on the strength of His Wisdom, of His Truth. It was His own work, not hers; it was up to God to achieve by His own methods, His own work. It was up to Marie Eugénie to believe and to use the means of Jesus: obedience in trust, in meekness and humility, in abandonment to God.

It is above all in her relations with the Church that we shall see her trust and submission shine forth. It might be that she could not make out “a hair’s breadth of difference between her ideas and those of Lamennais” and yet she would obey the magisterium of the Church beyond her lights. She might be disappointed in priests or bishops and yet fully recognise their authority. (6)

During the period between 1839 and 1849, M. Marie Eugénie laid the foundations of the Congregation and started to gain experience. A capable woman with plenty of intelligence, good sense, and wit; wholly possessed by Christ, she was to gather her sisters, form them, draw up the Constitutions, concern herself with financial and material things, develop a philosophy of education and an educational method. We are accustomed to quoting her lapidary sentences, her theological reflections, her lights on the mystery of the Incarnation, etc....from this period.

We also know that she suffered during these years. But it is difficult to imagine, or easy to forget that this Woman of Faith and of exceptional strength, struggled hard with her Faith. At any moment she might be a prey to anxiety, to scruples, to doubts, as we can see from the following quotations. But through these trials and her sufferings, Faith became gradually “incarnate” in her and transformed her.

At 28, eight days after her Final Vows, on Jan.1, 1845, she was writing to Fr. d’Alzon: “I am only just beginning to be flexible...I have made my commitments out of the fullness of my heart with the aim of using what is left of the life which Jesus Christ gives me...only to grow closer to God, to extend His Kingdom in souls, above all to submit myself completely to all He wills.” But she continues: “return of scruples, of sadness, of the lack of hope, of excessive sorrow over my faults.” (1.L.650.45)

And later...: “Trust is the most difficult of all the virtues...” (7)

Basically, all these temptations and desolation arose more from her lack of security and of trust, than from intellectual doubts. Marie Eugénie knew that God is love but she doubted her own “lovableness”; she felt the separation, the distance which one who does not know himself loved, can experience. “Nothing can convince me that there is a relationship between Jesus Christ and myself; I believe all that Faith says about it; I obey in all that they tell me to think about it; but all I feel is an abyss of separation.” (2.182.42)

“A great fear of God, a continual state of unbelief about everything, much dryness, many evil feelings and the dread for my condition that this causes me. Communion is hard for me; I do not know if it is my fault, but I always feel as if I had no God, or as if I was rejected by Him.” (7.1601.43)

And again, in her Notes: “I feel like a sacrilegious priest who, realizing the revulsion that God has for him, is as though obliged from outside, to continue all the holy actions... thus, I speak in the name of God and it is not God who speaks in me; I wear Him in my habit, in my authority, in my appearance and I can only weep if, on entering into myself, I measure the abyss which separate us.” (2.196.44)

Once again there came temptations against Faith, Hope and Charity: “I have not an atom of love for God...I must obliterate myself to make room for Him.” (8.1622.44)

Single-minded and strong-willed, she was still subject to discouragement, even to feeling of despair: “It seems to me that it is in despair that I have my dwelling.” (7.1551.42) (8) she had to go through the trial of accepting her weaknesses and sins, and of accepting salvation as a free gift. She had to understand that she could not attain moral perfection and that that perfection was not necessarily the perfection desired by God. Marie Eugénie knew moments of discouragement with herself, feeling of despair and might sometimes feel herself determined by psychological factors: her past, her temperament. In prayer, in Jesus, she found the answer: Faith.

“Jesus knows nothing of those inescapable heritages which we attribute to people. For me, it is the height of anguish to say to myself: a characteristic of mine is like evil itself; inescapably attached to me. What I have suffered on this account has made me always tell others: you are whatever you put into your conscious intentions and into your actions. You observe certain dispositions, certain actions where there is a defect: remove it, act in this way: it depends on you. Otherwise, we might as well lay down our arms, we might as well despair and bow to the inevitable.

This outlook conquered me for a time, and made me inwardly despair both of myself and of others, thinking that we were all imprisoned in the narrow circle of our natural disposition. But how swiftly all I know of my temperament loses its power when I let faith rule me! God calls, God acts, God forms the soul, and no matter what some spiritual authors may say, He is not restricted to forming it according to natural tendencies of very little importance in His sight.” (to Fr. d’Alzon No.1651, 1842)

Anne Eugénie first response to God was obedience. It was also Marie Eugénie’s last. We do not have time to examine this aspect of Marie Eugénie’s Faith and it is not necessary. We know this side of her so well. We know what her generosity, her ardour, her fidelity were, in her search for God alone and for His Will. She was convinced and had decided that God must direct her life. (9)

This road was sometimes hard and arduous, but for Marie Eugénie it was the surest and in the search for obedience, she did not spare herself. On the other hand, there was a complementary impulse, the other side of the coin. M.Marie Eugénie was called and attracted from the start by an attitude that was less active: abandonment to God. Sometimes, it was a matter of scaling mountain peaks; at others of allowing herself to be swept away by the sea. (Or sometimes to swim against the current, at others, allow herself to be carried along by the sea.) (10)

But I shall no longer linger on this subject either, because we will examine it in detail and in depths in the course of the session. I will only point out that the attractions and graces of the beginning of life are the same as those which developing and growing deeper form us all throughout our lives. To be always guided by the outlook of faith and to allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit is a question of grace and also of courageous and sustained efforts.

This kind of confession is often repeated in her “examens” in a way which sometimes seems to us excessive:

“For a long time now, I have had as it were, a mental background of unbelief to which I have given too little attention, so that it has secretly prevented me from allowing God to act through me, from relying on him to give me the words and see to my success. It seems as if, when there is something important to do, I am afraid to abandon myself to God. I do not go about these things as though sent by God and even in the spiritual direction of the sisters...it sometimes happens that I do it by using the resources of my own mind, not always trying to say what God wants, but what in my own opinion I calculate will produce such and such an advance.” (Vol.2 - No.166)

The moment was to arrive when for Marie Eugénie, obedience and abandon would become habitual attitudes (“second nature”) until she became totally “absorbed into the Will of God” (14.4.78)

Ultimately, what is striking when we read her letters, her private notes, her teachings, is the single eye, the one desire which dominates her life and is progressively strengthened, simplified and purified. God, Jesus Christ, the Church, are all one, and this unity was her whole life. Marie Eugénie never turned back. She always went to her God with greater realism and patience, more abandon and trust, following Jesus, in the Church. Faith is a great gift. (11)

Mère Marie Eugénie is Blessed because she believed. “Nothing without faith”- the motto of the Milleret family was fully realised in the life of Marie Eugénie. She bequeathed it; not to a family according to the flesh, but to her spiritual family, to us.

Our Congregation was, and is, built on FAITH.

III- THE TEXT which I would like to study with you is the third of the chapters on the Spirit of the Assumption, March 3, 1878: “FAITH AS LOVE OF THE TRUTH”.

Let us take the principal ideas of that chapter.

1. God addresses His creature: “God has spoken to us:”

- Through Scripture
- Through His only Son, Who is Truth
- Through His Church

The first right of God is to be believed when He speaks.

2. We answer God by Faith:

- Faith is a gift which must be developed (take the means)

- To steep oneself in the outlook of Faith
 - in such a way that the invisible outweighs the visible.
 - in such a way that the truths of the faith become the climate of our souls.

3. Love of Truth:

- Desire to know as much as possible of the Divine Truth.
- Truth transforms us (“your souls must be athirst”) and make us religious of Assumption.
- Know the Truth, make it something felt and experienced, make it live in you, so that it will be “incarnate” in our lives.
- Prayer helps.
- The Congregation provides us with means of being instructed in truth.

4. CONCLUSION

- Faith transforms our intelligence, fills our affections and gives us a new love.
- Faith is a gift of love and of mercy (Right of God)
- “Eternal life consists on knowing You, O my God and He Whom You sent.”

To know Jesus Christ is to begin eternal life.

ATTENTION! La page 15 se trouve au verso de la feuille, et la page 16 au recto!

IV - ELEMENTS OF OUR CHARISM IN THIS CHAPTER (March 3, 1878)

1. The right of God to be believed when He speaks. When God “imposes the faith it is an act of mercy and of love. Recognise the gift of God, in Jesus, in the Church. A direct, personal response to a Person.
2. The response of Faith is not a simple intellectual act, but it vivifies all our thoughts, our works, our relationships and becomes the climate of our lives.

“Seek to have an intense spirit of Faith. This is different from faith, period. It is a habit of putting it into operation in everything, of seeing everything through it, of saying everything through it, of saying everything according to its lights.” (Letter to Sr. Marie du St. Sacrement, undated)

“The purpose of annual retreats is to renew us in the life of faith, the meditations that we make every day also have as their aim to make us live in the life of faith.”

“What do we meditate on during our retreats? The eternal truths; what God is for us; what we are in relation to Him...if we are really steeped in these truths, if our soul, our heart, our mind are always filled with these thoughts, you can see that we live a life of faith.” (Chap. -78, p. 177)

“... By faith we raise ourselves higher, and live by thoughts which tend to eternity: this is the life of faith.”

“I want to go even further. To live by the life of faith, we must be accustomed to live in recollection, to know something of that which St. Theresa speaks – the interior castle – from the inside.” (ibid, p. 178)

3. Emphasis on the intellectual process by which we have access to the realities we do not see. “Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen.” (Hb.11:1)

“If we have the faith, if we have the spirit of faith, we shall think of God, of what He is, of His omnipotence... The thought of God, of the eternal truths, of the happiness that awaits us in Heaven should help us in our difficulties, in our sufferings. If we know how to forget ourselves in order to think of God, our sufferings, our doubts disappear fast. God is the light of our soul, He brings light to our darkness: let us draw near to Him.” (vol. 2, N°158)

“Faith rules judgment and taste as well as the affections... to study the faith and deduce from what it teaches, what we ought to teach... the habit of feeding our minds on the works of the Fathers, works written in the ages of Faith, in preference even to other works of piety... For this, we need firmness, and a more continual and more difficult sacrifice of our own ideas and tastes; I think however, that the daughters of this Congregation are called to his more than anyone else and that, having as their particular task, to submit their intelligence as well as their wills to Jesus Christ they cannot acquire the spirit which is proper to them except by renouncing all inclination, all action, even all judgement other than what might have been Jesus Christ's in their place.” (to Fr. d'Alzon L.1556 – Vol.7)

4- Faith, a gift to be developed through study, love of truth.

Study, which implies intellectual effort.

A search, love, contemplation of Truth in the manner of St. Augustine.

Faith transforms, is incarnate in life.

“Different in their unity, they (the passion) have characterized the Great Orders: love, St. Francis of Assisi; Faith, St. Dominic, etc.... a philosophy...

The Dominican studies to find the Truth, to present it in order, defend it; Faith is his philosophy.” (Letter to Fr. d'Alzon 5.8.44)

The Prayer of the Church as a means to Faith.

NOTES

1. Mère Marie Eugénie often refers to her mother:

“I had such a devotion to my mother” (Sept. 1841)

“I saw everything through my mother's eyes; her every word was a matter of faith for me.” (ibid)

2. Mère Marie Eugénie tells us, in a well-known letter to the Abbé Lacordaire, of her early years and her conversion. An extract follows:

“...To excuse this way of thinking, perhaps I should Father, go into the details of my first footsteps towards Our Lord. I was brought up in an unbelieving family which belonged to the Liberal Opposition of the Restoration. However, my mother wanted to see me a Christian, and her noble and forceful character led her to give my upbringing a character of renunciation which has always seemed to me more Christian than most fully religious education. My ignorance of the dogmas and teachings of the Church was inconceivable and yet, like others, I had received the ordinary Catechism instructions; I had made my First Communion with love and God had then granted me graces which, together with your sermons, were the foundation of my salvation. At fifteen, I lost my mother, to find myself in a house which was even more irreligious and there, I stopped frequenting the Sacraments, even though God had always made me so strongly aware of Him, though I sought Him so rarely. The doubts which had always been in my mind were strengthened. I spent several years questioning myself about the basis and the effects of those beliefs which I had never understood. Alone, and free to think as I liked, as no one was interested, I often asked myself what would happen to all those men and women and to me in the end, if anything would remain of us on the other side of the grave, and above all, what was the meaning of our existence; what obligations we had here below.

But God in His goodness had left me a bond of love: I could doubt the immortality of the soul, but I instinctively rejected everything that attacked the Sacrament of our altars, and when, in Church sometimes, I saw the Sacred Host in the hands of the priest, I would pray to Him in spite of myself, to make me spotless like the host, and to draw me on high.

But the whole of my education in which Christ had no place, by its very thoroughness constituted an invincible obstacle to these graces. A new change brought me into contact with some very pious women and that was, perhaps, the greatest danger. They bored me, they seemed narrow and although while I was with them I took up again my annual confessions at Easter, never perhaps, did I have so worldly an outlook nor was I ever so close to despising the spirit of God.

It was then, Father, that the mercy which had pursued me, brought me to your pulpit. Since I was expected to follow a course of Lenten sermons, I chose yours. Grace awaited me there. Your words fitted in with all my ideas, they explained my instincts, they completed my understanding of things, they re-awoke that idea of duty, that desire for goodness which were so close to fading from my heart; they gave me a new generosity, a Faith which henceforth nothing could shake.” (to Lacordaire, 13.12.41)

3. “No one has explored the ideas Faith opens up before us, I think even the clergy does not understand the scope of Catholic ideas, how much they clarify and vivify everything.” (1.3.37)
4. Basically, we have only one father but our first spiritual directors were very paternal!...”I could never help applying to you the words of St. Paul: ”You do not have several fathers, because there is only one who has engendered you to Jesus Christ, by the word of the Gospel.” (to Lacordaire, 13.12.41)

5. “Obviously, what is lacking in France today is religious orders for men, adapted to the character, the mind and I might even say the physical powers of our times... Of course the effect of a thorough education is not in the quantity of things learned; it is, if I may put it so, the development of the mind and character in the possession of the truth that extensive knowledge brings in a variety of ways...Now, what is capable of welding together all we have learned, of giving our studies purpose, unity, meaning? In one sense it is a philosophy; in another, wider sense, it is a passion. But what passion should we give to Religion? Passionate Faith, a passion for love, for the realization of the Law of Christ...” (to Fr. d’Alzon – N° 1627,44). See also the Chapter:” Building our work and our teaching on the foundation of Faith.” (28.4.89)
6. “the earthly regeneration of humanity, of its social law, cannot but come from the Word of Jesus Christ. Modern notions may obscure this certainty, I myself may not be able to grasp it; but this poverty, this night(of the intelligence does not prevent it from being so, or my faith from saluting I across my darkness.” (March 15, 1844 –N.I., N°192)
7. “I only experience a vast emptiness” (9.1854-47).”The light falls on a background of unspeakable desolation. “(9.1867.47). “For me nothing is more threatened than Faith, Hope and Love.” (9.1872.47). No more sensible attraction: only duty!
“At present I am empty of God in a way which frightens me, I do everything under constraint, nothing out of love”.(10.2015.49)
8. “Mass and communion are for me, ceremonies, nothing more.” (7.1551.42)
9. “It is God who directs all this, and never a more loving Hand, nor a wiser, could direct our destinies.” (1.125.40)
10. “Finally, if I were faithful to this attraction of an interior attention to the presence of God in me, as by faith and love, without any sentiment, nor imagination, I feel that I would profit very much in calmness, in virtue, in suavity and in light, above all, in abandon, virtue for which I think sometimes I have received a very strong attraction of grace, despite the repugnance of nature...” (1.72.39)
11. “When I review my whole life, how I admire the miracles that saved me from unbelief; I think sometimes that God has plans for me and if I cannot reconcile this with the sight of my misery, I tell myself that He loves to make use of what is the lowest, the poorest, the least, so that His grandeur and His strength may show forth more brilliantly in these clay vessels. Everything is possible to Him, and it is false humility which refuses to rest in His strength.” (O. I, p.64)

S. Marcienne Em.

July 6, 1980

AN AWARENESS OF GOD

- as it is expressed in Marie Eugénie's letters and private notes dealing with her interior life,
- as it is presented in her Chapter instructions,

What kind of God does Marie Eugénie show us?

Here are a few recurrent themes mostly in her own words
with a minimum of commentary...

“Talking of devotions, you will be very surprised at mine, sisters, because it is not at all usual.

It is a devotion to God as he is in Himself, and the astonishing thing is that I was only a child
when the idea took hold of me.”

(from a conversation, 15.1.88 – MOI c 19).

This was ten years before her death, and she was recording the spiritual bent of a life time devotion to “l'Être de Dieu”. And throughout her life, in retreat notes, letters or conversations with her sisters, she recalled how in her first encounter with God, he had drawn her in that particular way.

“Reverting to the experience of sweetness I had through the graces he gave me at my first
communion...lost in God, my soul forgot everything else... I was not aware of any
presence

but God's, and his immensity seemed to suspend and absorb all my faculties.”

(Sept. 1841- Vol. 2 – N° 178)

But as early as 1837, in notes written before her entry, - she was 20- Marie Eugénie was explaining that the idea of the immensity of God left her unsatisfied, that in Christ she found the way to the Father:

“This infinity, this immensity which defeats understanding, leaves me mentally crushed; I am never satisfied by what I read about it...The Word was made flesh...it is easy to understand his humanity, to imagine Jesus Christ, the God-Man...who understands the greatness of his Father, who on my behalf pays him all the homage that is his due.” (Vol. 2- N° 161)

And in 1844 she wrote:

“My confessor has been speaking of the omnipresence of God, and wants me to make it the subject of my meditations; I am reluctant to do so because I find the Name of Jesus by itself much more helpful than the thought of God’s immensity, which I am certainly aware of and adore, but without seeing what path leads from Him to me, whereas Jesus is a completely sure way... It seems to me that my whole hope of perfection turns on believing firmly in the Saviour’s help; in letting him act through me... The humanity of Jesus is wholly linked to the Word... that is the basis of the attraction of God on me.” (Vol. 2 – N° 193)

There are very many texts which show how Marie Eugénie approached God by way of Christ,

how she found, in her day to day experience, that the all – powerful God had come close to us in Christ through the Incarnation. I quote just a few of them in chronological order:

- “The expression ‘to please God’ suggests a human notion which I find difficult to understand as applied to God; I try to reach Him as Goodness, as eternal Law... Thus I find it much easier to love Jesus than to love God; I want to possess God... To long for perfect love, perfect holiness, perfect truth, is to long for God... but when it comes to Jesus, besides all these things... I long to see, touch, venerate his humanity through my senses.” (Vol.2, N° 153- 1837)
- “I felt that God wanted me to allow Jesus to act through me in all I do, so that my being, ever constricted, ineffective, useless, should always follow the direction that the Word would have given the Humanity of Christ.” (Retreat, 12.4.42- Vol. 2, N°183)

A month later she was writing in the same strain to Fr. d’Alzon (vol.7, N° 1561-16.9.42):

- “I see God as the first principle and origin of all duties as the author of all things, the source of the order and purpose we see in the world... but I see Him too as my God, my Father, my Saviour, my Bridegroom, to whom I owe everything, and in whom I would choose to be absorbed to the exclusion of all else...”
(to Fr. d’Alzon, 23.11.42- Vol. 7, N° 1566)
- “I have been meditating on Christ as the model we are to follow in loving God... Jesus Christ honoured by his Father unceasingly; his every impulse was directed by love of his Father, he lived only to serve his Father... I want to honour God in every moment of my existence, I want to act only as He wills to direct me to act, whether I live or die.” (Eight day retreat – Vol. 2, N° 190)
- “The thing I reproach myself for in my relation to God, is that I have not made Our Lord the real centre of my preoccupations, the formative principle of my life... I remember my former feelings of love for him... I see that I must not try to reach God through my reason. Reasoning sets me at a distance from him, it irritates me, it weighs me down. But my heart, my imagination and my will readily respond to everything that

has to do with God. What does it matter which of my faculties takes me to him, provided I go to Him.” (Monthly retreat, 4.3.45- Vol. 2 N° 197)

- “ These three resolutions sum it all up...to try to be completely dead to all that is not God, lovingly dissolved in his uninterrupted presence and to be a faithful copy of Christ, to live only for him, with him and in him.”

(Eight day retreat, Sept. 1856 – Vol. 2 N° 217)

Quite as much as God’s greatness and his closeness in Jesus Christ, Marie Eugénie was as deeply touched by the GOODNESS OF GOD.

In the rough copy of a letter probably addressed to Fr. d’Alzon in 1845, she said:

- “Recently, in the course of prolonged prayer which reached the greatest degree of intimacy accessible to so poor a soul, she asked God what message He had for her. At length the reply came: “I am goodness itself.” She hopes to be able to turn her deepest impulses to the service of Jesus Crucified by never viewing her own faults and weaknesses except in relation to that intuition of Infinite Goodness, and it is by this means that she tries to do so.” (Vol. 6 – N° 1508)

And again:

- “It is through his Goodness that he is my God and I have often delighted in worshipping his eternity, his infinity, and his power through that single perfection.” (O II p.93-94)
- “My chief resolution is to have faith in the Goodness, in the love of my God, in Christ’s activity in me, in his continual forgiveness.” (1845- Vol.2; N° 199)

Marie Eugénie was steeped in the theological thought of S. Thomas Aquinas. She passed it on in her instructions, enriched by her own spiritual experience. In her Chapters she often spoke of “God, the infinite good tending to diffuse itself”; “bonum infinitum diffusivum sui”; this formula recurs in several of St. Thomas’s treatises . (cf. “Quelques Constantes...”, Sr. Jeanne Marie, pp.21-27)

Just as there are for God’s greatness, there are many Chapters and other texts on the goodness of God and on practical ways we ourselves can practise goodness and kindness. It is remarkable how completely Marie Eugénie had made this theological teaching her own, and applied it to her own life.

Here are a few extracts from some of the Chapters:

- “Creatures whom Christ invites to become like his Heavenly Father (“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”)...must grow in kindness (goodness)...since God is the infinite Goodness who loves to diffuse himself.” (Chap. 3.11.82, Sur la Bonté, p.182)

- “If we are to know God, as catholic theology teaches, He must be known as infinite Goodness diffusing itself. “Bonum infinitum diffusivum sui”: these four Latin words are a complete definition of God. It is strange that, in conventional piety, there is often no dwelling on the thought of God as good, as infinite goodness...those whose piety makes them melancholy or depressed, do not pay God the homage he demands, of complete faith in his goodness eternally self-giving...Indeed, how could we not praise, bless, adore glorify and thank Infinite Goodness which gives of itself?”
(Chap. 21.7.83 p.316- “On the Knowledge of God as Infinite Goodness diffusing Itself”)
- “It is through goodness and kindness that Our Lord establishes relations with his creatures. He is kind and he wills that his creatures should be kind.” (Chap.16.3.79, p.297 – The fruits of the light are goodness, justice and truth.)
- “In the mystery of the redemption, the generating principle in all God’s dealings with man is his infinite goodness. In general, do not exercise enough of that unbounded trust in their approach to God. The conviction of the infinite goodness of his nature, and of the infinite kindness of his desire to diffuse himself is not developed enough... What leads us to abandon ourselves more completely to obedience, to poverty, to prayer, to the work of prayer, is continual reliance on God and always living with the idea of his infinite goodness.” (Chap. 13.1.78 – On Trust in God’s Goodness – pp.262-263)

Another of the traditional approaches is the thought of God, the IN DWELLING OF GOD IN US, is to be found in Marie Eugénie’s teaching. This is a legacy from the spirituality of St. Augustine, with a particular emphasis on the interior life.

- “At Baptism, the Trinity takes possession of our soul and sets up its dwelling there in a special way...He is in us, not just as He is everywhere, but present through a special activity, making himself known and loves. He is in us as in a chosen dwelling place, in a sanctuary, and this is why scripture calls the soul the temple of God... You will only attain that inner life, that attentiveness to the presence of God dwelling in you as in his temple...by ceaseless, untiring work.” (Chap. 11.8.78 – The renewal of our lives in faith – p. 179 and 182)
- “God dwells in our souls. He dwells there in several different ways: first by his nature, and his claim to our worship, then through his grace. Not only did he create us, but he endows us with the grace which makes us his friends. Our Lord is in us, not by his human presence except at communion, but through his grace and his spirit. He is , as it were, the soul of our soul, he

dwells in us as in his temples.” (Chap. 21.12.79 – On Humility, p. 472)

- “Besides being the temples of Christ, we are the temples of the Holy Spirit too, of that Spirit of holiness that is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ; given to us in confirmation and dwelling in us through grace.” (Chap. 5.12.75- Christ dwelling in us – p.536)
- “Our Lord ordinarily dwells in us through grace; he comes to our souls at many different times in our lives through the sacraments.” (Chap. 10.12.76- La simplicité et la droiture)
- “The in-dwelling of Christ in our souls must be what makes us joyful.” (Chap. 25.1.84- Like a true spouse, you shall be zealous for my honour)
- “Our Lord Jesus Christ lives in our inmost souls through his grace, the Holy Spirit has made it his chosen dwelling place, and when we set ourselves to learn to know him who has made us his temples, we are beginning to live as we shall in eternity.” (Chap. 7.9.84)
- “If the Trinity comes to dwell in our souls, it is so as to mould them into other Christs...the presence of God in us through grace is a presence of knowledge as well as of love.” (Chap. 28.9.84- On meditation)

And in her retreat resolutions for 1862 (Vol. 2 N° 224):

- “To think often of Our Lord dwelling in me, to try to live more in that inner sanctuary of which He is the centre.”

And Marie Eugénie describes the consequences which should follow from the in-dwelling of God in us:

- “When Our Lord comes to our soul and we listen to him, I observe that He transforms us in two ways. The first is that he fills us with the profoundest respect for his Father, a deep sense of adoration. Our Lord came on earth to adore him in spirit and truth...Everything starts with God.” (Chap.15.6.79 – Of the effects Our Lord brings about in the soul through Holy Communion)

- “Our Lord taught us to behave towards his Father in a spirit of sonship...In the long run, love should drive out excessive fear...I do not think that fear should be more dominant in the soul than love. We must be so much on fire to serve God and to do his will in everything that we turn away more and more from sin...once we have become settled in this desire, fear is less necessary... whereas we must continually lose ourselves in adoration, which means obliterating ourselves before God, fully acknowledging that He is everything that He is almighty, perfect, infinite, and that we are entirely his.” (Chap. 25.8.78 – Renewing ourselves in the spirit of Christ)

This passage can be related to that in St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans: “We know that by turning everything to their good God co-operates with all who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

I conclude with the HOLINESS OF GOD. Just as she did when she

Spoke of God as He is in Himself, of his goodness, of his in dwelling in us, Marie Eugénie does not only reflect on God and his attributes, but goes on to consider the implications for us in his service. In this extract from one of her Chapters on the Incarnation, she talks of the holiness of God and of human holiness:

- “The wonder of this great mystery is that it is a mystery of holiness...the key to the mystery is that beyond all that God is, is His Holiness. It is holiness that He seeks above all; what he wills is to create saints. Men argue as though God has wanted to found a kingdom or invent a doctrine, and not as though he wanted to create saints. It was saints that he wanted to form through the mystery of the Incarnation... Coming down to earth like this, Christ wanted to open to us, to each of us, the way to sanctity... It is only through Our Lord’s emptying of Himself in His Incarnation that saints could be formed. This is the origin of all holiness. This is the principle of renunciation of the things of earth and of the annihilation of the self in order to live in God, by God, in His Will... Christ calls us to take the road He followed Himself, that is to say, the way of self-emptying, the most complete renunciation of oneself, in order to share I His Holiness.” (Chap.15.12.78)

(Chapters of M.M.E)

July 6,1980

WORKING TO ESTABLISH THE LIFE OF GOD IN OURSELVES

(cf. "the Awareness of God)
1884)

(15th February,

My dear daughters,

We talked a bit about work the last time; I was referring more to active work, the work of our hands and of our minds, which occupies and fills our exterior lives.

Throughout the history of the Church one would say of someone who built a church, or founded a monastery, that he had accomplished a great work. We, too, have a great work to do, a great foundation to establish, and that is the life of God in our souls, and this is a work which must occupy us all our lives. By saying to you that by yourselves you can't accomplish much, I am pointing out what God asks of our weakness: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

Don't you sometimes think about the nature of God: what He is in Himself, this Goodness is, which is His Being? This is because you are called to imitate this perfection and have a great work to do in order to reach these perfections which, according to our way of thinking, constitute the very Being of God.

If you look at the Being of god, you would be able to better understand the imitation that Our Lord asks of you. God is the Infinite Good which loves to diffuse itself: this is the true foundation, the true idea of God: "BONUM INFINITUM SUI DIFFUSIVUM."

God: the Infinite Good! Doubtless, this is above all a great incentive to love and for great joy: but it should also urge you to probe deeply into your soul! To see if this goodness in your thoughts, your words, your actions; anything other than goodness in the furthest corners of your soul where one shouldn't find bitterness of rigidity or anything which comes from evil. Here is the great work we have to do. It is truly a great work to become good, to arrive at a state where the soul is entirely established in Goodness.

I might have other things to tell you, but for today I'm going to stay here. If you look well, you will see that many people are busy making others good; they notice their lack of goodness and prefer to be with good people; such is the tendency of our poor humanity. But then, we can't do otherwise. If you occupy yourself with trying to change the thoughts and dispositions of your neighbour, you will only meet with failure. You might have beautiful thoughts about it but you wouldn't have the power from on high. It is lonely with great difficulty that someone who directs another is able to change him even a little. But, when it is a question of ourselves, it is an entirely different matter; then we can have a great efficacy. So let us examine our souls, our thoughts, our sentiments, and expel all that is not in conformity with the goodness of God. Let us be entirely good, let us have the sentiments, the actions, the words which resemble the goodness of God, which come from a true goodness.

I would like to say something else on still another question: if God is Infinite Goodness, He is also by essence, Action. In God, there is no distinction between action and power as in creatures; there is no distinction between action and power as in creatures; there is no distinction between the faculty and its operation; there are no faculties which go from sleep to power in order to act, and then return right away to inaction. God doesn't have faculties; in God there is nothing that is not God, that is not essence, that is not the Divine Nature. As He is, so He acts. As He is absolute and subsistent being, so He is always Operant Action, Pure Act, Action by essence. Since His nature is to Be, His nature is to act. "My Father is always at work", Our Lord said.

We have to consider God under this second aspect, in order to learn how to operate continually on our souls. That is why I chose to begin with the example of those who build churches, because I want to show you that this work is like an edifice, a building that you raise in yourselves, a creation of all the virtues, built one upon the other by ceaseless action upon oneself. For it is true to say that one can no better define God than by saying these two things: that He is the Infinite Good and that He is Pure Act, a living act, constant and eternal.

S. Marcienne Em.

July 6, 1980

GOD IN THE BIBLE

We have seen what Marie Eugénie tells us about God, what facets of the God of creation enabled her to discover him as “her” God. Now we ask what the Bible tells us of God. How does it put us into contact with Him, who is at once so near and so far from us? In what terms does it ask us to listen to his voice and to reply? God who “no-one has ever seen”... “It is the only Son, who is nearest the Father’s heart who has made Him known.” (Jn 1,18) Only Christ can reveal the secret of the one God of the old and new Testaments.

GOD IS ONE

“ You shall have no other God before me” (Ex. 20,3). It was only gradually that the Hebrews reached the conviction that “the Gods of the pagans are naught”. As they came to realise that their God was not like other Gods, they understood that he was always with them, that he alone is God. (cf. Deuteronomy, Isaiah 44)

GOD IS HIDDEN

He is discreet, he is wholly beyond our understanding. In the Bible, this idea is expressed by what is said about the impossibility of seeing God. On the mountain God allows his splendour to pass before Moses. He is present only as passing by, in a Passover. (Ex.33,18-23)

“Moses said,” Show me your glory, I beg you”. And he said “I will let all my splendour pass in front of you...You must stand on the rock, and when my glory passes by...I will shield you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take my hand away and you shall see the back of me, but my face is not to be seen.”

The relationship of man to God is not one of seeing but of listening. Man cannot see God and live. God is hidden in his very closeness. In the Bible, man recognises God “on second thoughts” after he has passed (cf. Jacob’s dream, Gen. 28,16 and his wrestling with God, Gen. 32, and also the disciples of Emmaus.)

God is transcendent but immanent: this is the paradox of the God who does not allow Himself to be grasped, who is Mystery.

GOD IS REMOTE AND VERY NEAR US

Transcendence and immanence, God distant from us and close to us.

To express the absolute separation between God and man, the Bible asserts: “God is Holy”, “God is not like”... (cf. Isaiah 40;12-13),”who is like God?”.

God “is not like man” because he is the rock, the almighty... Who can measure the power of his love? And:

“Yahweh is tender and compassionate,
 Slow to anger, most loving...
 The greatness of his love for those who fear him...
 Yahweh’s love for those who fear him
 Lasts from all eternity and for ever...” (Ps 103/102)

God can be neither reached nor equalled. (cf. Gen 11, the tower of Babel)

He is the Living God, God of all that is. Only God is God, and we must constantly relearn how he should be adored. He is always greater than our idea of him, he continually disconcerts us and amazes us.

But to a much greater extent the Bible is a revelation of the closeness of God. The key idea of the Bible, the dominant religious orientation of the Old Testament, is the theme of the Covenant, of the God who is “with” Israel, a theme which reveals new depths of meaning with the passage of time and reaches its full development in the mystery of Christ.

As an example, let us take the story of Hosea, and listen to what God says to us through Hosea (Ho 1,2).

Chap.1: Hosea sees the parallel between his relationship with his wife and that of God with his

people; God is the husband of an unfaithful wife.

Chap. 2: There is a transition from the body of Gomer, Hosea’s wife, to that of Israel, the land.

There is no break between the two.

Whilst revealing his love and tenderness, Yahweh reveals how formidable he is. “I am going to lure her, and lead her out into the wilderness, and speak to her heart.” (Ho 2,16) There in the wilderness there will be a new beginning, God will make a new start. His tenderness for mankind is that of a husband for his wife.

“when Israel was a child, I loved him.” (Ho 11,1) Here God is revealed as the Father of his people. Chapter 11 is full of human images, it is lit as though by a smile of tenderness, “the light of his countenance.” In verses 3 and 4 he is at once father, husband, shepherd, he takes care of his own.

When man has felt the nearness and the remoteness of God in this way, he is impelled to become a worshipper. God is he whom we adore and he in whom we find rest.

Let us return to Jacob’s wrestling with God (Gen 32, 23-33). It takes place in a “passover” context, Jacob was crossing the ford...

“Taking his two wives and his two slave-girls and his eleven children...he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream and sent all his possessions over too. And Jacob was left alone. And there was one that wrestled with him...”

This One, remote and present, is him we wrestle with, who wounds us and blesses us. God’s blessing only comes to us with wounds and after a struggle. It is through wrestling with God that we become strong and able to worship him.

GOD IS “SOMEONE”

This is the theme of the Name of God. In what circumstances did God reveal himself to Moses? (Ex 3)

Moses, a man cut off from his people, a fugitive, a stranger in a foreign land, come to the mountain of God, which seems to him the end of his journey, but which is later shown to have been a beginning.

Vers 4: God calls Moses by his name “Moses, Moses.” Only God truly knows our name. Everything starts with the word of God.

V.7-9: God has heard the appeal of his people. Prayer starts as a cry, an appeal.

V. 10: “...come, I send you...” . The word of God endows us with an identity, shows us our path, gives us our mission.

V.11: “Who am I to go to Pharaon?”

V.12: “I shall be with you... and this is the sign...” so that God tells Moses is “first fulfil your mission, the sign will follow.

Then comes the revelation of God’s Name:

V.14: “I am who am” or “I am who I am”. God gives his Name. it is important that Yahweh should tell us his Name so that we can address him by Name.

Against the background of human religious activity, Yahweh intervenes, and reveals himself as God, present, acting, loving.

THE TRANSITION FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW

It is both an entirely new departure and a return. To the Corinthians who had set up schools of “wisdom”, Paul explained this transition from the God of the Bible to the God of Jesus Christ. He showed them how the philosophical tradition of Greek thought on the one hand, and the religious tradition of Israel, with its demand for “signs”, on the other, converge, confront the folly of the Cross, a crucified Messiah, a scandal to the Jews and folly to the Pagans.

We always need to be converted from the Jew or the Greek in us, to Christ, the power and wisdom of God.

Our relation to God is not one of cognition, but of re-cognition. God will never cease to disturb us by his folly, which is wiser than the wisdom of man, and his weakness which is stronger than our strength.

S. Asuncion

July 7, 1980

THE RIGHTS OF GOD

“Etre adoratrices et zélatrices des droits de Dieu.”

Throughout her life this phrase expressed Marie Eugénie’s deepest intuitions about what it means to be a religious of the Assumption, and came readily to her pen. When she set out to define the “spirit of the Assumption”, in the Chapter of 24th February, 1878, her opening words were:

“In an attempt to understand what is the fundamental characteristic of our Institute, I concluded that, everywhere and in every way, we must be adorers and filled with zeal for the rights of God.”

This expression is near the head of the list of those which occur most frequently in the provincial summaries in which the Congregation’s reflections on our charism is distilled. It shows what we want to be, and stirs the echoes of God’s first call to each of us.

In today’s world, where the rights of man, as they are achieved or denied, call so insistently for attention, does it make sense to talk of the ‘rights of God’? The God of the Bible, the God who revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth, can such a God have imposed his authority on man and established a relationship with him in terms of rights and duties? What line of approach makes it easiest for us to understand this notion of ‘the rights of God’ which so inspired Marie Eugénie?

My solution to this problem is a very simple one, to start by studying the biographical background so as to understand as fully as possible what its meaning was for Marie Eugénie. A second step must of course be to see how it relates to the biblical account of the relation between God and his people. We shall then be in a position to see exactly what Marie Eugénie’s vision commits us to.

THE EVOLUTION OF MARIE EUGENIE’S IDEA OF GOD’S RIGHTS

1- The biographical aspect.

Marie Eugénie’s idea of God, of his nature and greatness is inseparable from her feeling for his rights. This clear-cut and highly characteristic formulation developed as, so to speak, the logical conclusion and natural synthesis of three factors of central importance in her life: the mystical experience of her first communion, the liberal outlook of her father and his habit of referring to ‘the rights of man’, and her own reading of de Bonald on the advice of Lacordaire, following her conversion. (cf. *Quelques Constantes*”, p. 14)

we now know “ that we must look beyond de Bonald”, since he learnt from the Oratorian school. Condren, Olier, Bérulle, each taught that as his creature, man should be wholly devoted to the glory of God.

“It is of the nature of God’s rights that we should make room for him to dwell in us, as God, more than our own selves. And this from the mere fact that we are creatures. Any

rational creature should through the whole of its being, pay homage to its creator.” (D.S.T. XII. C. 1379) (Quand Dieu fait la route, by Sr. Madeleine de la Croix, en préparation)

This idea of accepting God as God, of seeing God as the Sole Existant, He who is greater than ourselves, before whom the creature is nothing, naturally appealed to Anne Eugénie’s desire to give herself completely and irrevocably to God, now that she had found him, and in him, the meaning of her life. It was an idea which lay at the root of her vocation, and was among the determining factors. This is how she saw the matter in 1837:

“I need the austerities of the cloister to be a Christian...these thoughts seem hard now, nevertheless this is the way to salvation. I can only do what I need to do in a convent, so that is where I must make up my mind to go...and then, apart from anything else, I owe it to God, whose rights I cannot abolish by denying them, to God who loved me, sought me, redeemed me, wooed and whom I never think of.” (2.153.37)

The idea recurs at regular though distant intervals, and when it comes, it reveals something of the activity of Marie Eugénie’s deepest self. In her weaknesses, trials, moments of revolt and disillusionment, the thought of ‘the rights of God’ was her compass bearing, her strength, her support. In 1841 she was writing:

“God gave me the grace of shedding many tears over my sins. The thought that I had totally denied God in his rights over me grieved me so deeply though without violence. I saw how much it was my duty to live in faith, hope, love and prayer.” (2.167.41)

A few years later she wrote to Fr. d’Alzon: “I have one consolation still, it is that when I stop being in control of my heart; my mind and my will, when all my faculties, far from being at my service and adorning me, turn on me and tear me apart, then I am left alone, in the inmost reality of my heart, face to face with stern duty. Then I know that duty is my master, and I am stiff, graceless, without any feeling of piety because all emotional conviction has deserted me, even if I cannot give my best because I am too wretched, at least I obey with a burning desire not to be a burden to anyone, and to discharge my obligations to every creature and especially to God if it costs me my life.” (9.1871b.47)

The death of her uncle, M. de Franchessin, aroused a strong emotional response in Marie Eugénie, including a certain feeling of guilt. She was deeply shaken, and wrote to Fr. d’Alzon with great honesty and clear-sightedness about her reactions. This was in 1851:

“The thought of how little I had contributed to the poor man’s happiness distressed me profoundly; I felt I had judged him unjustly, a sense of his loneliness, of his troubles, even of his financial difficulties, haunted me so persistently that I still dream of them at night, while feelings of love of God or joy in my vocation were completely dried up, and it was only my sense of the rights of God that restrained the persistent impulse to give way to regret. My fidelity in this is much more a matter of duty than of love, it is tinged with something close to fatalism. I am treating God too much as my master and creator, and not enough as friend and loving Saviour.” (11.2186.51)

In her early years, Mère Marie Eugénie experienced a certain discontinuity between her idea of the God who had certain right over her and the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ: “I am very anxious not to refuse God any of his rights, but returning his love is another matter.” (12.2627.57)

Again, in 1859: “ Ordinarily I only submit to God through the thought of his nature, of his rights, of how fitting it is to subordinate myself to his absolute perfection. God has shown me that Christ...the perfect Being, came down from Heaven for me, and gave himself to me

so completely, living and dying for my sake and on my terms, that to refuse anything I owe to his divinity is to refuse the corresponding generosity of living on his terms.” (2.222.59)

At this period, Marie Eugénie, conscious of her weaknesses, felt the need of help in living up to her understanding of what she owed to the rights of God: she kept asking for the direction of a firm hand to urge her to greater efforts:

“I made up my mind to ask to be treated without ceremony, so that it is not just the demands of obedience that I feel, but humiliation. Instead of so much consideration for my feelings, I need someone intent on upholding the rights of God more rigorously. On my side, I have promised Our Lord to make a real effort to be pliable, faithful and generous in everything to do with obedience and humility. I have never felt so strongly that obedience is the twin of humility.” (2.221.59)

The resolutions made during the 1863 retreat show that Marie Eugénie had succeeded in unifying her life. To live in harmony with the rights of God is to live in love.

“I shall remind myself that the greatest commandment is this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, etc. and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself; I shall recall that this commandment sums up everything, that without it nothing is of any value, and consequently everything must turn on it...that is my love he is asking for, and if he has so mercifully sustained me so far, it is so that I may come at last to offer him the fidelity, trust and love that I owe him. And so my chief resolution is to open my heart to love each morning.” (2.225.63)

The final written evidence of her faithfulness to the rights of God is dated 1890. Fourth in her list of retreat resolutions for that year comes the resolve:

“To follow my special call to adore through (Christ) and offer to God through (Christ) all that is his due.” (2.238.90)

It was in the period of her maturity that Marie Eugénie reflected most on the implications of her idea of ‘rights’: we shall find it most clearly developed in what she wrote between 1874 and 1882.

2. Meaning

Marie Eugénie found words to transmit her idea, the guiding thread of her life, fine but strong, as we have just seen. It was so central to her outlook that she presented it as the core of our spirit. What is the essence of her thought which appears clearly in her Chapters?

- To recognise the rights of God is primarily to be so absorbed in love and adoration as to obliterate all preoccupation with self:
“It is in loving God more than all else and in all else, in loving the Church, in loving our

neighbour and being anxious for his salvation that we really recognise God’s rights...you have become members of a Congregation whose character it must be that, in all that you do, love reaches a point of intensity which transmutes it into adoration. Let all your labours, all your thoughts, feelings, hopes and prayers be centered on God so that in adoring him, in concern for his rights, you may forget yourselves in love and adoration, always yielding him the place that is his due, as your preoccupation with created things diminishes.” (24.2.78)

Elsewhere, Marie Eugénie has more to say about adoration: “Whilst adoration is the respect, the unlimited homage we owe to God, our recognition of his rights and of his perfections, it is, more fundamentally still, an intensity of love.” (27.12.74)

Adoration absorbs the whole personality, for ever, and is also expressed by obedience: “How jealously God looks for your response to His right of love”, to which you are so deeply indebted! Respond with obedience. Would it be too much to respond by spending your whole life in love and adoration of him who has loved you so much? Give God all he asks of you, and if you are conscious of being poor and underserving, take your poverty to him, and he will enrich you. If you are cold he will give you his warmth and his life: he will give you his own love, his Spirit, and fill you with the fire and light of divine charity.” (26.10.82)

- In other Chapters Marie Eugénie speaks in more detail of the particular rights God has over man, and in the enthusiasm and single-mindedness with which she presents each of them we can recognise the importance they had for her, each deserves to come first. Can we decide between them? Should it be faith or love?

“As I see it, God’s first right is to be believed when he speaks. The first duty of man is to hear the word of God with deep respect and strong faith. You can see that if this is the universal duty of all Christians, we must go further: we must respond by love and adoration to the word by which God makes himself known.”(3. 3.78)

“Among these rights of his, the one of which God is supremely jealous, is the right of love. Initially he exercised this right in the mystery of the Father’s total self-giving to the Son, and of the Father and Son to the Holy Spirit; and then he pours out his love through all creation. Yet God had no need of his creatures, since he is the sovereign Good and self-sufficing. And so it is to exercise his right of love and to share his Goodness with us that God created us. So the Redemption too is the right of love calling for man’s love in return.” (26.10.82)

God has the right to be recognised for what he is: “Before all else our hearts must be set on the glory of God, on his right to our obedience, on recognising him as ever good, ever our gather, ever holy, ever perfect in what he wills and in his care of us, even when he send us trials. Our hearts must be set on being like incense at the feet of Christ, at God’s feet, on being consumed in adoration even if they are broken.” (23.3.79)

And he has the right of ownership over his creature man: “We can also look at the matter (evangelisation) from God’s point of view, consider what God’s rights over man are, what it means to his love and how it accords with his glory that creatures for whom he has done so much should be truly his. Man’s advantage coincides with God’s claim. Our neighbour loses nothing, we work for his salvation to God’s glory.” (20.7.79)

- Complementary to the rights of God are the duties of man. Marie Eugénie cannot help talking about them at the same time. Adoration and faith fall into this class; they are the natural responses which occur as a matter of course in those who discover God. But duty go God does not stop there:

“To give glory to God is our joy, our love, our aim; since if, here on earth, we are constantly engage in praising, blessing, adoring and thanking God, this is a foretaste of what we shall do eternally in heaven...In my judgment they are happy and close to the attainment of peace who, whatever their preoccupations, feelings, whatever thoughts are going through their head, in all the ups and downs of life on earth, keep turning back to God with one or all five of these impulses. These are no other than the principal duties man owes to God...”

“Through your vocation as daughters of the Assumption, you are worshippers (adoratrices) and to say ‘worshipper’ is to say one who discharges these essential duties towards God, one who loses herself in admiration, submission, an excess of love, so to speak... Well sisters, you who are religious dedicated to adoration, adore God by loving him, adore him by thanking him. It is sometimes difficult to thank him when we are suffering. I would like to convince you that the best way of coming through suffering is to give thanks for it...a vocation for adoration imposes a duty of giving thanks for it...a vocation for adoration imposes a duty of giving thanks in the midst of suffering, of difficulties, of the trials of life, rising above one’s petty personal concerns to give thanks to God.” (7.3.80)

- Through personal experience Marie Eugénie discovered that what springs from the heart

of this vocation is not terror, fear, constraint, the distantly respectful attitude owed to a “master”, but the love and tenderness proper to the God who has revealed Himself as, above all, “the Father” .

“Sometimes it is said that the duties God imposes on us are oppressive. This is something I have never been able to understand. It seems to me that on the contrary, every duty God requires of us is a mark of his love and mercy. Is the claim to our faith an oppressive claim? Surely it exalts and enriches us. If God had not imposed the duty of faith on us, where should we go, poor wretched creatures that we are?” (3.3.78)

She explains somewhere: “There is something so awe-inspiring, so over-whelming about this that, so as not to leave you even for a moment feeling crushed by the majesty of god, I would like to remind you at once that adoration and love are the same thing. Adoration is the greatest and most intense love possible to the heart of man.” (24.2.78)

And later she adds: “When you come into the presence of God, you are face to face with a huge debt, a debt of love; and God asks you to pay it because he loves you. He said so himself in scripture: ‘Yahweh has appeared to him from afar: I have loved you with everlasting love, therefore I have drawn you, taking pity on you.’(Jr. 31,1)” (26.1L.82)

- Marie Eugénie’s thought is quite clear, she is well aware of her daughter’s spiritual bent,

their essential vocation, that of worshippers. She showed them, and shows us, how to give this vocation its highest realisation. She turned instinctively to Jesus and Mary:

“ The words of Our Lord to the Samaritan woman have always impressed me deeply: ‘But the hour will come – in fact it is here already- when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: this is the kind of worshipper the Father wants.’” (Jn. 4,23) Jesus Christ is the first of these worshippers, and he has chosen us, sisters, to worship the Father with him in Spirit and in truth. But remember that if you are to be worshippers, everything must be blotted out and vanish before the greatness of God. There was a mystic who wrote: There must remain no idol before my God! And how indeed could you be worshippers in

Spirit and in truth, if you keep a little private idol and offer it incense and sacrifices.” (24.2.78)

“Mary was wholly absorbed in adoration; in her not one of God’s claims was ever infringed or neglected...And when, leaving earth behind, she was given the fullness of the graces she had received, her glory in heaven; she was taken up into an eternity of adoration and love.” (24.2.78)

And to put it even more clearly: “When I told you that sisters of the Assumption must be adorers and filled with zeal for the rights of God, I must have made it plain that the aim of glorifying God must always take priority.” (20.7.79)

“To enlarge our hearts, to purify them, to perform all our activities in a spirit of charity and pay God, through Jesus and Mary, the homage that we pay him when we make the best possible use of all our powers, that is the way to be true worshippers, and true sisters of the Assumption.”

THE BIBLICAL APPROACH

Let us now turn to the texts to which Marie Eugénie referred explicitly or implicitly, when she spoke of the ‘rights of God’; letting them speak for themselves and following the development they suggest.

- “Hear, O Israel, Shema, Israel” (Dt. 6,4). Israel’s declaration of faith comes down to sharp and clear. God is speaking to us. “The first duty of man is to accept the word of God with deep respect and complete faith”(M.E). God first acts to establish a relationship with man, and expects to be heard and believed. This is the demand implicit in the Covenant. Faith in the one true God means obedience, the mark and the effect of faith. “Respond by obedience.” (M.E.). To obey is to hear.

What are we summoned to hear? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength; you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Dt.6,4; Mc 12,30-31)/ this was Israel’s undertaking in answer to God’s love: to love him, to fear him, to serve him. In the name of love, God exacts an answering commitment, and teaches him to love every man as his neighbour. This commitment, this love, implies a radical choice, a painful renunciation. As Marie Eugénie put it: “...this commandment sums up everything... without it nothing is of any value... And so my chief resolution is to open my heart to love each morning.”

The love which springs from the Covenant is expressed in the words lovers use to speak of the bond which unites them as bride and bridegroom: “I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you.” (Jr. 31,3) It emphasizes the idea of belonging very strongly; the bond of the Covenant is one of mutual belonging: “You are my people and I am your God.” (cf. Jr. 31,33)

- When Marie Eugénie speaks of adoration, we can hear another commandment behind her words: “But Jesus answered him, ‘Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.’” (Lk. 4,8) “And how indeed could you be worshippers in spirit and in truth,

if you keep a little private idol and offer it incense and sacrifices?" (M.E.) Only God has the right to receive the homage of adoration from man; adoration expressed by gestures of gratitude and respect ; which are signs of worship, but essentially an attitude of the heart.

"It is related in the Apocalypse that the twenty-four elders sit round the throne of God, and throw down their crowns in front of the throne, saying unceasingly: 'Holy, holy, holy!' " (cf. Ap. 4, 8-10) (Ch. 24.2.78). The gesture of adoration is accompanied by the hymn of adoration and praise. "...if, here on earth, we are constantly engaged in praising, blessing, adoring and thanking God, this is a foretaste of what we shall do eternally in heaven". (M.E.)

Adoration, recognition, gratitude, praise, thanksgiving are properly aspects of religious activity, the ordinary expression of the relation between God and man. This structure of prayer and gesture does not simply express the need man has for his creator dependent as he is on God for all that he is, it is also the fulfilment of a duty, that of serving God through the activities of worship.

It pleased me to find, in the *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*: " Jealous of his unique right to religious worship and obedience, God requires of us that we should recognise his holiness, turn to him as the only true God, and so make us witnesses to his holiness among them. But this religious worship is only of value if it is the expression of obedience to the Law, of deep faith, and of heartfelt praise."

- The key text inspiring Marie Eugénie's approach is very significant: what is in question is the form of public worship: "But the hour will come – in fact it is here already – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshiper the Father wants." (Jn 4,23)

Jesus explains the nature of the new form of worship he is announcing to the Samaritan woman: true worship is 'in spirit' possible only through the Holy Spirit, communicating himself to those whom he brings to a new birth. This is the perfection of adoration, the consecration of the whole man, mind, body and soul, to God. By this worship in spirit those born of the spirit unite the worship they offer with that in which the Father is well-pleased. They echo the cry of the beloved Son: Abba, Father. For the new way of worship is addressed, not to a remote and unapproachable God, but to the Father who faithfully communicates his Spirit to each human being.

Worship in spirit and in truth also implies acting in accordance with a sincere love of one's neighbour. The service of God is not only an upward movement: God dwells in man through the Spirit. Jesus and the Father are with whoever practices the commandment of love. Communication with God impels man to an ever greater conformity to him, and leads to a love of others to the point of total self-giving: this is the worship the Father seeks and accepts. God is not in search of offerings, his desire is to communicate himself. His is a living glory, its essence is to give life, thereby expressing the power of his love. Those who have a part in his glory are caught up in this current of love so that they may transmit it throughout the world.

- There is one more aspect of worship, as St. Paul puts it: "Think of God's mercy, my

brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of human beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God.” (Rm 12,1)

“To enlarge our hearts, to purify them, to perform all our activities in spirit of charity, and pay God, through Jesus and Mary, the homage that we pay him when we make the best possible use of all our powers, that is the way to be true worshippers, and true sisters of the Assumption.” (24.2.78) This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us; inspired by him we can, in the ordinary practicalities of daily life, live with the Lord, sharing his work of love and self-giving.

CONCLUSION

When Marie Eugénie summoned us to adore the rights of God in Spirit and in truth, her aim was high: to bring us to the central reality of the Christian life, so that it can be embraced in all its rigour. It is a dual vocation: to complete acceptance of God, in the relationship which he initiates with man (acceptance of his love) and acceptance of our own real selves as he sees us; and to love offering itself to and for others because we have been freely redeemed by the immensurable love which God shows us in Christ. This acceptance and love find expression in trust and thanks-giving.

It is in this context that we can talk of the “rights of God”, against the background of the Covenant, within which God might withdraw by right of law what he had granted as a free gift. These rights and duties do not establish a master-slave relationship, but develop the relation of sonship through love and gratitude. They are rights which do not impose duties as constraints, but call forth generosity and liberty.

Marie Eugénie said too:

“To be devoted to the rights of God, to offer ourselves, to suffer in reparation for whatever infringes these rights of his, to submit fully to his rights, so that they may be fully realised in us, this is a way of seeing our service of God which attracts us at the Assumption.” (20.10.82)

We have to realise his rights in us, this as yet uncompleted task must be pursued so that our lives may be the confession of his glory, the AMEN we answer to the praise of God, “through Christ.” (cf. 2 Cor. 1,20)

S. Clare Teresa

July 8, 1980

A FEW INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE INCARNATION

I have been asked, by way of an introduction to this part of the session, to give a short talk on the Incarnation. The subject is vast, of course (an understatement to say the least!) and on reading the texts of those who are going to speak about Mère Marie Eugénie and Jesus Christ, I found that I would be repeating too much of the material which is in those texts to make it worthwhile venture- with, however, one exception which is the subject of education. I shall, therefore, confine my talk to several remarks which may serve as a guide or as reference points as you listen to the conferences on Our Lord.

From the very beginning, the Incarnation was the center of the Congregation, its *raison d'être*. In a letter to Father d'Alzon (27 August 1843) Marie Eugénie expressed her innermost thought and desire concerning the young congregation:

“We are not well enough established for me to dare express our aim as I understand it – a contemplative life enlightened by religious studies and source of an active life of faith, zeal and liberty of spirit. For me the real finality, the true hallmark of a foundation is its interior consecration to one or the other divine mystery, to which that work is like a constant homage. I believe that we are called to honour the mystery of the Incarnation and the sacred Person of Jesus Christ as well as the loving attachment (adherence) of the Blessed Virgin to Jesus Christ.”

(She goes on to say that she is obliged to give other arguments for the existence of a new congregation but, for herself, Marie Eugénie cannot settle for anything less than this consecration to the Incarnation of our Lord.)

The consecration of the Congregation to the Incarnation is manifested first of all by its Christocentricity. The Incarnate Word is the center, the binding element of the congregation's existence.

The word “Incarnation” does not appear that often in the texts you have (1878) but we find a whole series of chapters on the perfect love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And on the tenth of March she told her sisters: “I don't know exactly how to express it for therein is the very life of our congregation. The love of Jesus Christ and of the Church is its principal characteristic.”

And she takes up the same theme on the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation (May 2 1884): “When I think back on those first days, in seeing all that Our Lord has done for us, I was struck by a thought that I need to share with you. In our Congregation all comes from Jesus Christ, all belongs to Jesus Christ, all should be for Jesus Christ...”

Jesus Christ is the Truth itself and the object of all our ardour, our adoration and our love. “I feel that I won't have time to tell you all that He should be for us.” (10 March 1878)

In the Incarnation, Marie Eugénie finds the source of our theology (philosophy), spirituality and apostolate. This gives an essential and beautiful unity to our lives. Jesus as the expression of God's Truth, Beauty and Goodness found in the doctrine (Bible and tradition of the Church) nourishment for the individual spiritual life (piety or devotion) and source of the apostolate.

- Piety divorced from theology at best falls to the level of individualism and sentiment, at worst leads to a deformation of the true Christian life.
- By the same vision, action and contemplation can be lived harmoniously and not as an interior division for the person.

It is interesting also to remark that Marie Eugénie takes the catechism definition of man's purpose

on earth "to know, love and serve God" and transforms it ever so slightly to give the following:

"I would say that each of you, on entering here (the congregation), has devoted her entire life to knowing, loving and serving Our Lord Jesus Christ perfectly and to making Him known, loved and served." (10 March 1878).

Her additions: Jesus Christ instead of God, our Creator, and perfectly.

In short, Jesus Christ is ALL for M. Marie Eugénie. Cf. Col. 1,16-20, I Cor. 15,28)

A second characteristic of M. Marie Eugénie's devotion to the Incarnation is the accent on the divinity which corresponds, I think, to what has been said of her sense of God. Her awareness of what the Word is as Second Person of the Trinity from all eternity makes her all the more sensitive to the divine condescension. The contemplation of the God-Man leads her to a more ardent love for the sacred Humanity: "We should be penetrated by these thoughts" (the Word through whom all things were created etc.) "for the more we understand Our Lord Jesus Christ and all that He is as God, the more we are touched by all that He is as Man – the more deeply His birth, His childhood, His hidden life, His public life, His teachings and His sufferings touch us." (10 March 1878)

The condescension made her all the more sensitive to the mysteries of the infancy and the childhood, to the presence in the Blessed Sacrament which represented for her an extreme form of God's emptying Himself. The word "anéantissement" occurs frequently in both letters and chapters. The humility of God is seen especially in the fact that one who is great and powerful accepts to be lowly and despised.

"To draw us to himself, he did not hesitate to show us that he loved us to the point of despising himself." (7 April 78)

The French school (*école française*) of spirituality had a very great influence on M. Marie Eugénie, especially in the early years of her religious life.

"This leads me to a third side of our life which was very important to us at the beginning of our institute when we were not numerous: the life of Jesus Christ in us." (14 December 1873)

She read Cardinal Bérulle's works assiduously – and made Father d'Alzon read them too. Although Marie Eugénie makes fewer references to Bérulle as the years pass, it is evident that his spiritual doctrine had been thoroughly assimilated. The theme of letting Christ live in one's soul appears constantly in various forms. The simplest expression – and the easiest for us to understand is St. Paul's "For me to live is Christ." It is harder for us to identify with those expressions which seem to imply that that one's own personality is somehow reduced to zero in order to allow Christ to live in our humanity. Today we would speak of losing our life or egoistic self and of finding our real self in Christ, and eternal life.

"It seemed to me", Marie Eugénie wrote to Father d'Alzon (copying her own personal notes), "that God wanted me to allow Jesus to act in me in all situations, that my own being,

constantly bound, powerless, useless, should follow the impulse that the Word would have given to the sacred Humanity; that for myself, I had nothing more to do than to enter into a state of despising self, annihilating self, self-forgetfulness. I should think only of letting Jesus act in me, of accomplishing with absolute obedience what I think that He would do at each instant if He were in my place..." (18 May 1842).

The letter continues for some pages in the same vein, and continues (not yet the end!):

"It seemed to me that this placed me in relationship with the Incarnation and especially with the Eucharist. Both the Sacred Humanity emptied before the Word and attentive solely to obedience and adoration – without any reference to self – and the Sacred Host, were models and light for me." Ibid.

Another devotion associated with this school of spirituality was the idea of letting Jesus live His mysteries in us. This led to a certain kind of historical imitation of our Lord's life. Again there is a certain emphasis on those mysteries which were especially humble and hidden: the infancy, childhood, the humiliations of the Passion etc. this will be taken up in detail by Fermina.

Another way in which Marie Eugénie speaks of the Incarnation refers to the Assumption. Human Nature has been assumed by the Word and our human nature should be assumed by Christ.

Lastly, I find in Mother Foundress an intuition that is rarely expressed as openly and clearly as she might have today in the light of the theology of Vatican II. She shows a deep respect and appreciation – despite all that has been said above of annihilation- for all that is human, for all creation: Goodness, Beauty, Truth. Despite a certain pessimism which marked the period, she is amazingly optimistic and confident with regards to both mankind and creation.

"the Incarnation is the mystery to which they (the sisters) should have their special devotion since it is in this mystery that all human things have been divinised and discover their true finality."

(Letter to E.d'Alzon 12 September 1843)

I think she would have enjoyed Teilhard de Chardin!

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A Theological note concerning the Incarnation today:

Theology today tends to emphasize the humanity of Christ rather than the divinity. (This is just a question of emphasis!) Jesus is truly human and thus there is a real human experience, growth, a development that we can discern. His Baptism, temptations, mission, rejection and death are real human events and not lessons of a God who gives Himself as a model. Jesus gave a fully human response to all the events of His life – to his life. In this sense, He is our model (the one who goes before us, the first) and a mediator. (cf. Heb. 2,17-18)

Jesus' life, death and resurrection constitute the definitive revelation of God in the human condition – and man's full destiny. The Resurrection is not the last in a series of divine acts but the central mystery of Christ which illuminates and reveals the total meaning of His Person.

S. Marcienne Em.

July 8, 1980.

JESUS CHRIST IN THE LIFE OF MARIE EUGENIE

While going through the writings of Marie Eugénie, we can discover what Jesus Christ was for her, the progressive revelation of Jesus in her life, from her early childhood “where Christ had no place” down to her last days when, before her crucifix she would say:” How we learn to love Him by looking at Him!”. One of her very last words was:” I look at Our Lord” (January 16, 1898). Her mystery, “Jesus”, and the motto on her ring “Lord, You know that I love You”, also speak of the place Jesus Christ held in her life.

I will simply prepare the ground here, and above all, I will allow the texts themselves to speak.

Some sentences from her Letters to Fr. Lacordaire (13.12.1841) make us understand that, just as for her Faith, Marie Eugénie holds to Jesus Christ as to Someone Whom she has discovered:

“It seems to me that one cannot have a greater desire than to give oneself, to abandon oneself to Jesus Christ and to live only for Him...
 ... ever since you had given me the desire to consecrate all my being to the service of Jesus Christ...
 ...this desire to enter into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ of whose virtue no one had taught me...I was brought up in a family of unbelievers...but God, in his goodness, retained me by a chain of love...involuntarily I rejected any attack on the sacrament of the altar...
 ...all my upbringing in which Christ was not mentioned...”

In a letter to Fr. d’Alzon, she recalls that first call of Jesus Christ, her desire, from that moment, to have only one purpose, fixed on Him and on the extension of His kingdom:

“I went to Notre-Dame, to the very place where I had once upon a time received such a firm purpose to overcome every obstacle so as to work at the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ... then, while I only saw the earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, He saw His interior kingdom in my soul and while I only dreamt of the mission which He could give me... He was drawing me by a secret love for the sole purpose of possessing me and of appropriating my heart...I offered myself in sacrifice to God so as to busy myself solely, if necessary, with my relations with Him, but at the same time, I begged Him to preserve my love for His kingdom on earth” (To Fr. d’Alzon, undated: 1843-Vol.7; n° 1851).

By a personal attraction, Marie Eugénie was oriented towards abandon to God, dependence, passivity in His hands. In this, she would have felt herself in agreement with Berullien spirituality (the French School); she has been influenced by his spirituality of adoration, of the submission of man before God, of the submissiveness of the human nature of Christ IN THE INCARNATION, of identification with Christ. She notes in her retreat of February 1841:

- “To want to share the dependence of the sacred humanity of the Word, to renew, bring about endlessly the submissiveness which is not natural to me, as it was to Jesus Christ...”

- I have tried to say my Office as the echo of the voice of Jesus Christ and reflecting His feelings to the Father in a total emptying out of my own, which are lost in and thus united to, those of Jesus Christ in such a way that in my prayer, only His will remain... formerly, I would try to walk before Our Lord, now I must cease acting-allow Him alone to act; no longer walk, but allow Him to “ (Vol. 2, n°168)
- “It has seemed to me that God wanted me to allow Jesus to act in all things in me,... to follow the impulse that the Word gave His sacred humanity” (to Fr. d’Alzon, 18.5.42 – Vol.7, n° 1551)
- “I am willing to submit myself in such a manner to the influences of the life of Jesus in me, that His feelings prevail over mine. I want to have in my heart, what was in His, in my mind only the judgments of His mind, in my body what He suffered” (15.8.42-Vol.2, n° 185)
- In her consecration of herself, March 25, 1843: “I offer myself to You to be forever a tributary of Your Sacred Incarnation” (Vol.2, n° 188)
- “Since yesterday, God calls me to just one thing, the necessity of allowing the Spirit of Jesus Christ to live and act in me instead of my own, by a mort inward recollection, a more passive prayer and life, a greater faith, the abnegation of my life, of my action and of my mind” (Retreat 1860- Vol.2, n° 223).

Very many texts follow this line of total dependence on Jesus Christ. This reminds us of Paul, addressing the Philippians: “You must be of the same mind as Jesus Christ.” (Phil.2,5)

Marie Eugénie hears this call to submissiveness not only for herself, but for the whole Congregation being formed:

- “We have to be extremely holy to do ordinary things in a spirit of faith...to see God in things. In all we do to be simply attentive to grace in others and in ourselves...I think that the daughters of this Congregation are called to this, more than anyone else and having taken as their task, to submit their intelligence as well as their will to Jesus Christ, they cannot acquire the spirit that is proper to them except by renouncing every taste, all action, even any judgment which Christ could not have had in their place”. (to Fr. d’Alzon, 19.07.42- Vol.7, n° 1556).
- “For me , the real goal, the real seal of a work is in its interior consecration to one or another divine mystery... I think that we are called to honour the mystery of the Incarnation and the Sacred Person of Jesus Christ, as well as the fidelity of the Blessed Virgin to Jesus Christ.” (to Fr. d’Alzon ,28.08.43-Vol.7, n°1590)

Throughout her spiritual journey, Marie Eugénie was to learn that if Christ is everything to her, it is as He is the Way, Path, Passage to our Father and to our brothers:

- “I was sad, as I often am, at not feeling that Jesus Christ draws me to Himself...at being always sent to others, at not having light except for the

sisters, at not feeling anything to convince me of the work of Jesus Christ in me... I said, as I often do, that He is not treating me as a spouse.”

And further on, in the same letter:

- “It seems that nothing stops me now from belonging to God...It seems to me to repeat “quis nos separabit a caritate Christi?” was not pride, but that I owed this trust to the Poor and All-powerful Spouse...I always return to the poverty of Jesus Christ, it is the condition in which I love to find Him... It is very much the place of my choice” (to Fr. d’Alzon, 28.07.42-Vol.7, n°1557).
- “To dare to love Jesus Christ... not to doubt the Heart of Jesus Christ” (Retreat 1873-Vol.2, n° 230).
- “Jesus Christ who is my Goal is also my Means... go by Jesus Christ, to Jesus Christ: this is my whole life so that it may be what God wills for it...Jesus Christ is my Way as well as my Life” (Retreat June 1862- Vol.2, n° 224).
- “Our Lord has made me feel, for some time now, how worthy He is of Love, how much I need Him, and how through all the channels of His grace, He, the infinite Good, the All-powerful God comes to me with love if I could but recognise Him” (Retreat, March 1868- Vol.2, n° 228).

Marie Eugénie also teaches her sisters to correct the direction of their life as they follow Christ:

- “We are made to live by the Spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we must often look and see if our soul is turned in the same direction and in the same way... Do we habitually turn toward Our Lord Jesus Christ, towards His feelings, towards His thoughts? ... He was turned to His Father by a complete emptying of himself which was adoration, so that He was able to say that He was humble and meek of Heart” (Chap.25.08.78- To renew oneself in the Spirit of Our Lord, p. 201).
- “The Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ gives us access to God; it is by it alone that the relations are possible between God and us” (Chap. 21.01.72- The Life of Jesus in us).

Here are some more passages, without commentary, to help us understand the teaching given by Marie Eugénie in her Chapter Instructions, with her spiritual experience transmitted through her letters and retreat notes. They tell us how Jesus Christ manifested Himself in the life and teachings of Marie Eugénie.

Marie Eugénie and the BLESSED SACRAMENT:

- “When I look for the mystery best suited to make me devote myself to Our Lord, I return without fail to the Blessed Sacrament. All the other mysteries, all the states of Jesus Christ, touch me to a certain extent and at different times, but this one touches me always and attracts me immeasurably. Dare I say that it is the form under which Our Lord loved me, made Himself known to me, and came to seek me. I cannot really picture the Person of Our Lord and all the images that I try to form of His presence bother me and tire me out; there, He is present, and a few walls between us or a little way to walk do not bother me when it comes to talking to Him” (to Fr. d’Alzon, 26.09.56 – Vol. 12, n°2579).
- “From childhood, pride and self-love spoilt my character, but what concerns me more deeply is the thought of the grace I have received, whether to save me from serious perils, or to inspire me with a love of the Blessed Sacrament, an attraction for prayer, feelings of love and submissive reliance on Jesus Christ, etc.... what have I made of them?” (Retreat 1859- Vol.2, n°222).
- “I think there must be very few people, especially in religious life, who cannot remember times when they were young and when the thought of our Lord in the tabernacle, loving them, calling them, was enough to fill their heart and make it overflow with love. Many of you have certainly felt the joy of being called, of being chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ, and of being loved; while on your side, you delighted in preferring him to everything else, in often receiving him in Holy Communion, and then carrying him in your hearts through the streets of a town, or the empty roads of a country district” (Chap. 25.10.75-Love of our Lord in the Tabernacle).
- “Through the Eucharistic presence of our Lord among us, his affection and his love are always with us. When God calls us to be His, He is choosing us as his brides. The choice is his first of all, our choice comes second...He never stops loving us, for his part, and when he has once chosen us, he is forever good to us, forever our Father and our bridegroom” (Chap.27.06.81-By his presence in our midst, our Lord is our Friend, our Advisor and our Strength).
- “If Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is the worshipper of the Father, he is also the mediator between him and men...When we prone before the Blessed Sacrament, let us always be united to the Humanity of Christ who is always before the Father interceding for us” (Chap.20.10.82-Jesus, worshipper of the Father and mediator between God and man).

Marie Eugénie and CHRISTOCENTRICITY:

- “We are to live through Christ and in Christ; we must turn to him with all our affections, all our tenderness, our whole heart...Several of you have taken a vow to work for the extension of Christ’s kingdom in others, that is to say to try to make him known and loved; but first of all, we must try to establish his kingdom in our own souls, to make our Lord our undisputed Lord, the sole Master, ruling alone without rival” (Chap. 07.09.72-Love of our Lord).
- “How, through love, love tender, lively, ardent, the fullness of love, can I remould all the desires which make me live for myself so as to live in Jesus Christ, poor, unassuming, humble, so as to be ever anxious and careful to have him beside me...? So that the poor little human plant still retained in the soil of

the old Adam, of fallen nature can be transplanted in the soil of grace to which through baptism it properly belongs, to live by Christ, through Christ and in Christ. That is the surest way and the easiest too. Love is our greatest strength” (Chap. 27.12.74- On Adoration, p. 401).

- “It must be possible to recognise the living Christ in the sisters of the Assumption. if Christ is to live in you, He must live in your hearts, all the affections of you heart must be full of him; He must live in your minds, all your thoughts must be related to your knowledge of him; He must live in what you do, every action must be for him; similarly He must live in your memory, your understanding, your imagination, and in all the powers of your soul; then he will be reflected in you; you will be other Christs.” (Chap.30.09.81- Work and suffering...)
- “What you do, your jobs, your lessons, are not the stuff of your life: the important task is to live the life of Christ; to long only for Christ, to live only for him.” (Chap. 23.12.81-Of Christ the guest of our soul).
- “The purpose of every interior trial, of every kind of purifying experience, is that Christ should live in us” (Chap. 02.09.88- Trust and self-abandonment to God).
- “There is only one foundation which is Christ. It is on our Lord Jesus Christ that we are built, that everything is built... In all we do, we are building on rock first of all on the rock which is Christ, and then on the rock of faith in the Church” (Chap. 01.08.80 – How we should build on the rock which is Christ, which is the Church).
- “Our special vocation is to seek our Lord always, to live in the truth of our Lord, to found everything we are on our Lord” (Chap.24.12.77- Christ, a mystery of Love).
- “Do not reject any devotion approved by the Church, but view them all in relation to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Chap. 08.07.76- Relating all devotions to Christ).
- “The prayer of Christ is the source, the pattern, the strength of our prayer, for we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Chap. 29.01.88- On purity of intention)

(Chapters of M.M.E.)

July 8, 1980

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION

(cf. "Jesus Christ in the life of M.E")

(2nd May, 1184)

My dear daughters,

We have just celebrated the Anniversary of our Foundation. Looking back to those first days and seeing all that Our Lord has done for us, I was struck by one thought that I would like to share with you. This is, that in our work, all comes from Jesus Christ, all belongs to Jesus Christ, all must be for Jesus Christ.

ALL COMES FROM JESUS CHRIST.

Who else, my sisters, outside of He who called us, had a clear conception of what we were to be? No one, neither he¹ who, at St. Anne d'Auray, had what he believed to be a revelation of a desire of the Blessed Virgin to have daughters consecrated to the mystery of her Assumption; nor those of us who were the first sisters. Each one contributed something according to their particular ability, but the greatest merit was that they were asked to give themselves without reserve to a plan which unfolded in the unknown.

Our Spirit, our greatest treasure, how did it develop? Our spirit, which each of you knows well, and which makes up the particular personality of our Congregation: it is above all, Jesus Christ, the King of Eternity, living in souls and in His Church; it is the extension of His reign within us and in others; it is a strong spirit of prayer supported on one hand by the Divine Office where we find the path of the saints and the devotions of the Church, and on the other hand by Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where we enter with Our Lord into the four aims of the Divine Sacrifice. There, there is the Rosary which I so often see in your hand throughout the day, the Way of the Cross which so many of you find the time for. There is also a certain liberty of spirit which encourages each one to follow her particular grace; there is an ardour which urges us to live a life of virtue, not by constraint nor by minuscule regulations, but by a greatness of spirit which pushes us to obedience, poverty, humility, regularity, patience and mortification simply in order to please Our Lord and to follow Him, to such an extent that we didn't want to be second to any other order in the practice of these virtues, all in conformity with our Apostolate and Rule.

And then, that fraternal spirit, full of respect and simplicity, which is something that we draw from the Ancient Orders, and from which flows the type of education we give our students. Who saw all this in the beginning? Who knew that we would have the Divine Office and the Blessed Sacrament exposed on our altars? All these things, who saw them? Our Lord alone knew it, and it is under his guidance that little by little, by the Rules we wrote, by the usages we developed, by the graces which were given us, by the sisters God sent us, by the advice and virtues of those whom God placed on our way, that all these things were revealed. It is for us now to preserve and develop them.

So much for the spirit; but for the sisters themselves, who sent them? Was it not Our Lord who, from near or far, drew them by His irresistible attraction to His service? Each of

¹ L'Abbé Combalot.

you knows this attraction which the Lord places at the depths of a soul and by which He fills and draws it. You know how He places shining before our eyes, the crown of virginity, how He knows how to envelop us with love for His service and for His beauty which is so much scorned today; the beauty of His infancy, of His Cross, of His holy Gospel. And you know moreover, how it was He who, by His hidden action, led these souls to the work that He wished to form. All is, thus, of Jesus Christ.

ALL BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST.

Nothing is more important than to fill one's soul, one's mind and one's will with the thought that all belongs to Jesus Christ. Material things, property, houses, nothing that we use in this world, belongs to us. We began the foundation in a poor little apartment, then in rented houses; and we were only a few poor girls without a place in the world. God has given convents, gardens, boarding schools, chapels, furniture and objects of art. All comes from Him. Is it for this reason that we attach ourselves to these things and consider them as your own? Or isn't it rather that knowing that we belong to Jesus Christ, we know that all these things are also His. It is Jesus Christ who has given them, it is to Him that they belong and it is only for Him that we use them. And if it pleased Him to withdraw any one of these things, should we be bothered? Given the spirit He has given us, wouldn't we rather count ourselves lucky to be able to go back to a place similar to that where we began with such fervour?

But, let us pass quickly over the possession of material goods and come to people. These also must be for Jesus Christ for those whom we love and who do us good can also be possessed like property. To be attached to persons more than to property and material goods is perhaps natural, but it isn't what God intends for those whom He has chosen for the extension of His Kingdom.

ALL MUST BE FOR JESUS CHRIST.

I have already spoken of the sovereign attraction by which God draws souls; this attraction is the gift of Himself. What a gift- the Incarnation of the Word! And in His holy Infancy, what abandonment, what despoiling, what dependence. What a state of powerlessness God reduced Himself to in order to be given to us. The Gospel is none other than the great mystery of giving: this is the truth, this is salvation, that it was Himself that Christ gave until in the end, He gave Himself more completely still in the Eucharist and when He stretched Himself out on the cross to give us His life right to the last drop of His blood. Who doesn't feel that it is by this that Jesus Christ called us? By the beauty of His gift, the beauty of His love, of His abandonment, of His generosity?

And you, has He called you to anything else? Oh no, He calls us to give ourselves as He was given. If, in the Incarnation, He gave Himself entirely to men, the, by the Religious Life, we give ourselves entirely to Him. In His Infancy, He holds out His arms to us, so that we may be little, obedient, and given without any resistance to His Divine Will. What will be the form your life will take? Will He make of you an apostle, calling you to work far away; or rather a Victim, stretching you out on a bed of suffering which would be your cross? In any case, what He expects of us is a perfect abandonment, so that, having received all from Jesus Christ, all that we are is for Jesus Christ – to be used by Him and for Him.

Whether we are young or not, let us strive for abandonment without reserve which will open our souls to an ardent desire for the extension of His Kingdom, devoting ourselves to this with all our strength after the example of the Apostles whom we are so conscious of during this Paschal tide. What did Our Lord do, then when He was risen? He formed His Church, finished preparing His Apostles for the Apostolate and for martyrdom, because they were all martyrs. He armed them to spread the truth, to belong to Him without reserve, to be the incarnation of His teachings, taking it to the farthest ends of the world.

The Evangelisation of the world by the Apostles is a miracle and there is nowhere in the known world where an Apostle has not set foot to take the teachings of Jesus Christ. Where did they get the strength? From their union with the Divine Master. They taught the Gospel and they became themselves the expression of that Gospel; Jesus Christ lived in them and everything in their being proclaimed Him. Let us also, work to express Jesus Christ in our lives; let us work to receive from Him what we are to give to others; let us abandon ourselves without reserve, striving to contribute – each according to her humble means- to extend His reign; let us work, since we are His spouses, to become Apostles.

These thoughts have struck me as I see what God has done with so little. I wanted to leave them for your meditation so that they bring forth fruits that God expects. Do you think that God has worked this miracle for nothing? Certainly to make something out of nothing is a miracle: in fact it is a bigger miracle that expelling an illness from a body that is still alive. What a great miracle it is to make something out of nothing; something that is so complete, holy and agreeable to God as a Religious Congregation must be, such that the Prophet could say:” How beautiful are your tents, O Israel, how magnificent your battalions.” Let us be faithful and grateful. Let us respond by working to become those magnificent battalions. Let us respond to the miracle and let us continue it, so that all the designs of Jesus Christ may be accomplished by the free commitment of each of us, by an ardent and generous love, which opens us to all Our Lord may ask of us in the way of perfection, of works of zeal, of suffering perhaps; but let us respond always with love and generosity.

S. Asuncion

July 8, 1980

TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST

Marcienne told us this morning what Jesus Christ was for Marie Eugénie how she lived her love and about her love. I come back now to the subject of the fourth chapter of Marie Eugénie on the Spirit of the Assumption: «Knowledge and Love of Jesus Christ» (10.03.78); I will simply read it with you to better enter into the thought of Marie Eugénie.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

We cannot pass over this in silence. From the very first lines, the breadth of spirit of St. Augustine is before us. Marie Eugénie had thoroughly assimilated his doctrine. It enabled her to make the link between the love of truth of which she had already spoken, and Jesus, “Truth Himself”. Truth is something personal, it does not reside in disincarnated intellectualism, it demands, not only assent, but love; or rather, it is “the object of all the ardour of our adoration and of our love, Our Lord Jesus Christ. “His name is the spark that lights Marie Eugénie’s passion and enthusiasm; she is once again on fire to communicate her commitment “all” for Jesus Christ (cf. Col.) ; she challenges us to commit ourselves with her: “This is the life of our Congregation.” The love of Jesus Christ and of the Church are its principal characteristics.” Marie Eugénie knew that we do not need any novelties or peculiarities; her pride is to bring us into the main current which has its Source in Jesus Christ and which bursts forth in the many witnesses of “doctors, religious, saints of all times.” Among them, St. Augustine is still the model: “This great Doctor had a heart as wide as the Church; there is nothing peculiar or exclusive in him. This, my sisters, is still one of the characteristics of our Congregating: we should have something catholic, something universal about us.”

A second point follows in this introduction, from what Marie Eugénie has just said and completes her thought: “How can we find words to show you what we ought to be for Our Lord, and what Our Lord ought to be for us? I will make use of expressions consecrated by the Church.”

Here again, we recognise the solid quality of Marie Eugénie’s faith; it is not possible to speak of Jesus, to give ourselves to Him, without reference to the Church. The Gospel, and the meditations that men and women of all times have made on it, remains the indispensable frame of reference for all Christian experience. Marie Eugénie refers more particularly to two of them: those of St. Ignatius and of St. Francis of Assisi. The Principle and foundation of the Spiritual Exercises, some points of the meditation on the Kingdom, are shown in their relation to the Gospel: «To know, love and serve God; I must impress on you that each of you on entering here, consecrated her life to knowing, loving and serving Our Lord Jesus Christ perfectly and to make Him known, loved and served.” And monks and nuns tell Him... “that they want to accept everything, to be as poor as possible, as obedient as possible, as loving as possible, as pure as possible, as full of the Gospel as possible, and that they will not put any limit to the gift of themselves.” On his side, Francis wished only to live the Gospel, “his order has vowed to observe the Gospel in poverty, chastity and obedience.”

Paul VI had really grasped the spirit of Marie Eugénie when he said at the Homily for the Beatification:” Mother Milleret who let the spirituality of St. Augustine, of St. Benedict, of

St. John of the Cross and of St. Ignatius work together for herself and her daughters, wants a religious family passionately committed to continuing the mystery of Christ.”

As if in three strokes of a paint-brush, Marie Eugénie draws, in an aside, the outlines of the religious life: “perfectly”, “by means of a most merciful choice and call of Our Lord”, “they go to meet Him, give Him their hand.” “What distinguishes the religious from the Christian life is the manner of living it, not from a personal desire, but as an answer to a call. We adopt a means by which we can go all the way with the Gospel, because of Jesus and His love, in a very close personal relationship with Him.

Now, let us leave the introduction. Marie Eugénie starts her great theme: “To know Jesus Christ.” What does she tell us?

TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST

“There are two ways of knowing Our Lord: one is religious instruction which is received with love and avidity; the other is the attention of the soul to Jesus Christ, the overwhelming awareness it reaches of Jesus Christ.”

Marie Eugénie cannot but be faithful to herself. Faithful to the master lines of her thought, she applies them also to the knowledge of Jesus. This knowledge enlists all our faculties it engages first the intelligence in an effort of study, of research, but “with love”. Marie Eugénie is incapable of envisaging a “dry” inquiry into the knowledge of Jesus Christ which does not engage the heart. “The attention of the soul to Jesus Christ” implies all that we have by way of interest, of desire, of love. Without knowing it, Marie Eugénie shares the biblical concept of knowledge. For the Biblical man, “to know” overflows the limits of abstract intellectual knowing and expresses an existential relationship. To “know” someone is to enter into personal relations with him. But let us see in more detail how Marie Eugénie examined the twin strands of study and of attention to Jesus Christ.

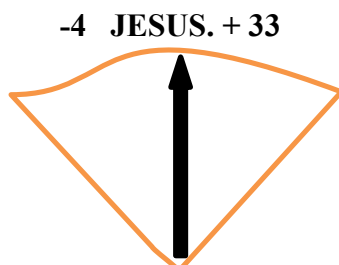
a) The study of Jesus Christ.

Marie Eugénie begins by making a good Christological synthesis; she is full of classical theology, of the “teaching of the faith.” Her words flow on without a break to present the mystery of Jesus Christ; her thought cannot help following the “descending pattern”: her starting point is the Trinity where things have their beginning; “The Word is the joy of His Father”/.../ The Father is the creator, but it is by His Word that He created all things; and when He created man,/.../He had before His eyes the God-Man/.../it is on this admirable Model that man was made. “Let us stop here for a moment. Marie Eugénie underlines the link that exists between creation and Jesus Christ. Let us dig into this; but first, let us listen to another paragraph of Marie Eugénie’s: “It is not simply as Jesus Christ come down to the earth He created that He claims the knowledge and love of man; it is as the Redeemer Who comes to him, to give him back hope.” From all this, we can visualise a very simple diagramme: a straight line which represents the unfolding of life, from the beginning; when the plenitude of time came, the Word was made flesh; He burst forth into life; we can see Him for several years; now, in 1980, we can see ourselves in relation to Him.



1980

You can see that this is an over-simplification, so the interpretation that follows from it, is very inadequate. The link between creation and Jesus Christ is even more profound and vital. Christ is at the center of creation, Christ is the revelation of the heart of life. Jesus, the Son of Mary is the Epiphany of what always was. (ck. Col. 1, 15-20). The diagramme “visualised” is slightly different:



There is a further step in “the study of Jesus Christ”, which brings together the two principal elements of Marie Eugénie’s thought on the subject:” it is thus that the soul forms a relation with Jesus Christ as Creator and Redeemer; it is the first study we should make of Him, the first that we can know of Him:

Col. 1,15-17	Col.1,18-20
<p>He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation for in Him were created all things in heaven and on earth everything visible and everything invisible... all things were created through Him and for Him before anything was created, He existed, and He holds all things in unity.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CREATION</p>	<p>Now the Church is His Body, He is its Head. As He is the Beginning, He was first to be born from the dead... Because God wanted all perfection To be found in Him. And all things to be reconciled Through Him and for Him, Everything in heaven and everything on earth When He made peace by His death on the cross.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REDEMPTION</p>

Prov. 8,22-31 is the poetic basis of what I have just said. Marie Eugénie quotes it (“I was by His side, a master craftsman/delighting Him, day after day...”). The Resurrection leads us to the Creation. The Resurrection is the revelation of the creation. He – All – In – For...

b) Attention to Jesus Christ

It is interesting to pick out the expressions Marie Eugénie uses when she speaks of the attention we should bring to Jesus Christ: “intimate concern”, “loving attentiveness”, “recollection”, “effort towards union”. Marie Eugénie encourages us to concentrate on the interior life; she invites us to absorb it, to make the shift from intellectual study to personal, intimate experience. There is no interior life, says Madeleine Delbrel, we have to live our life from the interior; with Jesus Christ, adds Marie Eugénie.

This interior life has nothing to do with a turning in on ourselves, a sterile concern for ourselves. Marie Eugénie goes even further: “ so having said that you should study Our Lord Jesus Christ, I must tell you – if you will excuse the expression – to empty ourselves of all that is not in conformity with Him.” She makes her idea still clearer: “ When other thoughts, other concerns, other anxieties crowd into your mind, you may say: ‘I have been created for eternal things. God gave me His only Son to be the object of my thoughts, the admiration of my mind.’ ” For Marie Eugénie, the realities of faith are more real than the visible world. To experience them, one condition is necessary: detachment “from all the little things which have so much power over us.” This is the first step which leads us to the knowledge of Jesus.

Here is the second: “Not only must you detach yourself, but also see that your attention is loving and fruitful.” Marie Eugénie is well-acquainted with the spiritual tradition of St. Therese: “No interior life is possible, unless we begin by making ourselves attentive and faithful to Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Loving, fruitful, faithful attention like that of a painter who tries to penetrate the essence of his model, to grasp its mystery and then reproduce it. He studies it from all angles so as not to miss a single expressive characteristic, a specific, unique detail. “We have to approach him and apply ourselves to him.” (What a picturesque example she chose in the bust of Sixtus V!) It is thus that we should look at Christ. “The Church presents Him sometimes as He was during His childhood, sometimes in His hidden life, sometimes in His public life, sometimes in His sufferings/.../ because in this way, we can acquire a broader knowledge of Jesus Christ.” Marie Eugénie alludes here to the aim of this knowledge: the imitation of Our Lord, and she uses the same word twice: “copy”. We know this is not quite right, we will come back to it tomorrow.

c) The third step is that “from attention, we must try to pass to recollection. This is something more.” Marie Eugénie touches here on the central point of the knowledge of Jesus; no one can know Him through their own efforts, first we have to allow ourselves to be taught by the Father; those who are docile to Him are drawn onwards to Jesus (cf. Jn.6,44- “ No one can come to Me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent Me.”) It is in the Spirit that we are able to say ‘Jesus is Lord’ (No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit’ I Cor. 12,3): it is the Spirit Who reveals to us the mystery hidden in Him. Marie Eugénie did not express it in the same way, but what she tells us is surprising: “Our Lord dwells in us by grace /.../ if the soul submits to the action of the divine Master which is none other than the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ she knows Our Lord Jesus Christ even more.” For Marie Eugénie, recollection has a spatial breadth; here it is not simply a question of looking within, of not letting ourselves be distracted by outside matters; recollection means allowing ourselves to be worked on by grace, being attentive to the grace dwelling in us. This recollection may lead us further than we expected. Marie Eugénie continues: “There in the depths of the soul and in recollection, there is a knowledge that nothing else can give, a knowledge that vivifies all else and which will quickly supercede whatever you may have learnt on your own.

d) Union

“Lastly, I come to union with Our Lord Jesus Christ: it is to this that attention and recollection should lead.” What does Marie Eugénie understand by union? It is interesting to point out how, for her, union is the normal result of a progression in knowledge which could also be called communion because it is participation in the same life, perfect union in truth and love. “A person united at least momentarily to Our Lord, remains under His hand; He does with him what He wills, and it is then that the mystic can say:” I live now, not with my own life but with the life of Christ Who lives in me. “ (Gal. 2,20). (Touchingly, she introduces a discreet qualification: “at least momentarily”)

This communion is the ultimate end to which you, as Religious of the Assumption, should tend; this is the “perfect knowledge” that I touched on just now. And again:” As Religious of the Assumption, you should tend to that perfection of your state, union with Our Lord; but a union which is real and intimate.” Marie Eugénie well knows the illusions which can conceal themselves under this word. She adds: “It is the fruit of long labour. We do not reach that complete recollection of the mind, dependent on Our Lord, without having worked very hard at it.” These are the conditions that pave the way for union and which allow us to sustain it, because “God can bring you to union in an instant by the prayer of quiet or of union, but afterwards, we still have to work to maintain His grace.”

Marie Eugénie insists yet again on the nature of this union; it is a state which embraces the whole of life and the whole of the mystic’s life attests its authenticity; it is a grace, an opportunity: ”It is a great happiness after having worked a long time, to be established in that state, where Our Lord Jesus Christ is the absolute and sovereign Master, where all that He asks us to do, is done, where the soul, completely flexible in His hand and inflamed with love, sits at His feet, like Magdalen, in that inner sanctuary, where God dwells.”

CONCLUSION

Once more before we separate, let us read another passage from the Gospel of John, that of the encounter with the first disciples (Jn. 1,35-39). There are four people concerned: John the Baptist, with two of his disciples and Jesus Who passes by. Three verbs link into action:

<u>LOOK</u>	<u>COME</u>	<u>STAY</u>
John stared hard at Him You live?	followed	Where do
Saw	Come	Where He lived
See	so they went	and stayed
Saw		
Jesus is a Sign	Jesus is a Call	A dwelling
Know	Imitate	Live with

The three words: See, come, stay with run through the whole Gospel of John; they define a relationship with the Lord. Jesus is Someone we can see; He is an attraction; a dwelling.

Know – Imitate – Live with. This is the approach proper to the disciple that Marie Eugénie has proposed to us through the medium of words. She finishes her chapter on the characteristic attitude of the disciple: seated at the feet of the Lord, like Magdalen he listens, he looks, he is attentive. We, too, are invited to remain in this attitude, “to know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent. “ (Jn 17,3); to enter into the great current of life and of light which springs forth from the heart of God and which leads us to Him.

IMITATING JESUS CHRIST

Mère Marie Eugénie tells us that imitation is necessary in order to reach that union with Jesus which we desire. She invites us to “imitate” Jesus, to live the life of the Spirit, to extend his Kingdom. We are invited to live the life of Jesus.

- Ch. 23.2.73 “The whole life of a Religious of the Assumption should be spent living the life of our Lord, living by the Gospel, so that our Lord will be everything for her...How sweet and pleasant it is to be under the obligation of putting on Jesus Christ!”
- Ch.21.2.75 “Seek to cultivate the seeds of grace, given us that we may be like Jesus Christ.”
- Ch. 23.2.73 “In order to arrive at a resemblance to our Lord, there are steps to be followed. We have to begin by imitation; union will follow. I say first imitation . In the Pontifical for the Profession of Virgins, the Bishop addresses this word to them: “Veni”, “Come”, and they answer: ”Yes, Lord, we will follow you with all our hearts.” Everywhere in the Gospel, our Lord tells us to follow Him: Come, follow me.” It is true that the first thing he says to the young man whom He called to the perfect life is “Sell all you have, leave everything”, but immediately after, He adds: ”Veni, sequere me.” Renunciation alone is not enough to prove love. It is not only with the mouth and the heart, with tenderness and affection that we must love our Lord; it is above all by imitating His works by leaving what we are to become what He is.”

Our Pope has just told the young people at Parc des Princes that this “Come, follow me”...shows that Christianity is always linked with a living person: Jesus Christ. He is the guide, He is the model. We can imitate Him in different ways...”. And for Marie Eugénie, following Jesus Christ means: resembling Him in our life, manifesting His life in us. We have been called to follow Him, and to follow Jesus means first of all to imitate Him.

Following Jesus implies a personal attachment to Him: we follow Him because we love Him: we do not know where we will have to go but we know in Whom we have put our trust...drawn to Him, we leave everything and follow in His footsteps.

- Ch. 22.11.82 “You have heard His voice: “I call you” – and when our Lord calls, what He always asks for, is progress. He wants to be born in your soul; He wants to bring it humility, poverty, patience, penance, love of the Cross, of sacrifice, of prayer. When our Lord calls a soul it is because He wants to live more in her, to have more space there, so that there may be Jesus Christ.

All Christians are bound to follow our Lord in some way or other, but there are souls who are called to do it in a more perfect manner. Thus after the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the Apostles went to preach the Gospel throughout the whole world, it was really Jesus Christ who said to each of them: ”Come, follow me.” It was for your sake that I, Who am in all things equal to the Father, left Heaven; I took as my portion the mission of proclaiming His Word to the world; I taught the Truth; I gave my life in

witness to that truth; and you are to help Me in my work, by bringing my Gospel everywhere. This is my will for you.”

- Ch.16.5.85 “To follow Christ in both the A.B.C. and the ultimate secret of the religious life; it is the beginning just as it is the end. If we follow our Lord, if we take things as He did, we are on the way to perfection.”
 “Resemblance” to Jesus is necessary because the Father wants to discover in us the features of His Son. A son is loved for what he is, not for what he does. That is why this imitation of Jesus is not just a matter of copying this or that, but “to be found in Him” (Phil. 3,9).
- Ch. 22.9.82 “But to follow Jesus Christ is to resemble Him in His life and to manifest Him in us. How are we to do this, except by practising the virtues of which He gave us the example? This is the practical side of things, which is by no means the easiest. Thus, we must often say to ourselves: “Am I humble when humiliated, when things reflect no credit on me, when my pride is hurt?” Then, let us look at Jesus Christ and seek what He was. We will discover that in order to reproduce his life in us, we have to be humble in humiliation, submissive in obedience, faithful in the accomplishment of the rules, on the great occasions as well as the small ones, and what is hardest of all, patient in the contradictions and sufferings of all sorts.
 To follow Christ, we must also be mortified in meeting the circumstances of daily life: cold, heat and everything which is hard on our nature. It is to the degree that mortification becomes part of the habits of our life, that we can say more and more: “I am following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.”
- Ch.23.12.81 “When our Lord comes, He wants us to give Him everything; He wants us this much more for our sakes than for anyone else’s. He brought us to the religious life to find un us souls to live for Him alone.”
- Ch. 9.8.81 “Knowledge of Him is what will contribute most to form your resemblance to our Lord. We have already begun our eternal life when we apply ourselves to the knowledge of Him Who has made of us His temples...”
 “It is a matter of knowing Him, and the power of His Resurrection, of communion in His sufferings, of becoming similar to Him, in death, as St Paul says: “All I want is to know Christ and the power of His Resurrection, and to share in His sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death.” (Phil.3,10)

The Holy Father, in his address to all the religious last May 31st, told us:

“To follow Christ is something very different from the admiration of a model...to follow Christ is something existential. It is to want to imitate Him to the point of allowing ourselves to be moulded into His likeness, to the point of becoming for Him – in the words of Elisabeth de la Trinité – “another humanity”. This is exactly what Marie Eugénie tells us. First, we know that it is not simply meeting Jesus but it is constantly returning to the path Jesus has already travelled before us. “...I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come.” The demands of this following will cause us to break with the past:” Anyone who prefers father or mother to Me is not worthy of Me.” (Mt. 11,37) To be like Jesus in our conduct, listen to His lessons: ”Shoulder my yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.” (Mt. 11,29) In order to resemble our Saviour in our lives, we must share the

Master's destiny, carry His cross: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mk 8,34) , drink His cup:" Can you drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptised?" (Mk 10,38). One must receive the Kingdom from Him: "I tell you solemnly, when all is made new and the Son of Man sits on His throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel." (Mt 19,28) One must decrease so that He may increase.

Ch. 13.1.78 "...Jesus Christ looked at each one of You, His gaze marked you for His own when He called you to Himself. We must ask Him to keep that gaze fixed on us. And why did He look at you? Because He loved you. He loved the young man whom He called to follow Him, but who rejected the grace and friendship of Jesus. Thank God we did not do that, we answered the call, we entered the religious life; let us often ask Jesus to look on us in friendship... to enter that intimacy where respect, faith, love and liberty are united."

The call to love, to live in friendship...

Ch.4.10.74 "The more we leave ourselves behind, the more we find our Lord; we experience the joy of being united to Him, we possess the peace which He diffuses in a good conscience by His grace and consolation. To the extent that we make sacrifices, that we achieve a greater resemblance to our Lord Jesus Christ, to the same degree we discover a joy which springs from the presence of God in us, a joy which the world does not know and which surpasses all the wealth and all the joys of this earth... In the measure in which the elements of the life of Jesus Christ appear in us, in that measure peace begins to be established in our soul."

"Christ tells us how we can be happy, on conditions which – I cannot deny it- pose stringent demands. But it is precisely here that we find the nub of the problem: that is, that man can fulfill himself to the extent that he is capable of imposing demands on himself", John Paul II tells us.

Marie Eugénie insists very much on the oblation of our Lord, Jesus who emptied Himself, which we must imitate. For us this takes the form of "stripping ourselves of our own lives", "let there be less self", "a detachment from myself" in order to "receive from Him what we should give to others", "the more we lose ourselves the more we find Our Lord."

Ch.20.2.80 "To live the life of our Lord, to depend on Him, we have to separate ourselves from all that is of the earth, not allow ourselves to be influenced by the earthly side of things, we must above all place ourselves under the influence of Him who is our Father, listen endlessly to his word, constantly turn towards Him, seek to resemble Him... God has destined each one of us to resemble Jesus Christ in a special way. How eager we should be to form Him in us and shrink from wasting our time with useless things... It is by copying Him through love that we come to resemble Him. Just to look at Jesus Christ and to be transformed into Him.../May Jesus Christ find us incorporated into Him in Baptism, in Holy Communion and also the fervour of a life which will have been an imitation of His."

Ch.4.10.74 “We cannot fill ourselves with the life of our Lord, we cannot manifest Him in our mortal flesh, to use St Paul’s expression, except on the condition of stripping ourselves of our very life, of our own ideas, that is, of what is our own “me”. It is this “me” in all its forms that we must reject and leave behind if we wish to put on Jesus Christ.”

This does not mean that each person will not retain her liberty; each one is destined to reflect Christ’s likeness in a particular way, according to the mystery of Jesus which she is called to live, the Mystery which Jesus wants to live out in her. You recognise the influence of Bérulle: “What God wants to write in each soul, is Jesus Christ”, and Marie Eugénie adds: “this is one of the devotions of the Assumption”. And it is the entire mystery of the Incarnation.

Ch. 14.5.86 “Our vocation calls us to follow our Lord as closely as possible and consequently to study His words, His thoughts, His attitude towards those around Him.”

Ch.21.1.72 “Our relation to God dwelling in us must be like what Christ’s human nature was to His divinity...It is Jesus living in us Who inspires us with the sentiments contrary to vice. How much Grace there has been in our lives even without considering the sacraments, where we have already seen the effects of Christ’s life in us!”

Ch.5.8.88 “It is good to meditate on one or the other of the mysteries of our Lord’s life, because, in order to arrive at a certain interiority, one must keep Jesus Christ constantly in view, as one would do for someone one loves, to whom one listens, imitates, and to whom we wish to belong wholly, without division, by the most complete conformity of our will to His. Why should we keep our eyes on our Lord, if not to desire what He wants, and to imitate Him in His different mysteries? “

Ch.8.7.76 “ What is particularly in the spirit of the Assumption is to have Jesus Christ constantly present to us, not in a vague and general way, but in a precise way, by considering Him under one or the other of the states of His life, by applying to ourselves one or the other of his words, so that imitation and practice may flow from attention to this divine Model.”

Conforming our lives to that of our Saviour (cf. Gal. 2,20)

Ch.27.6.75 “Adjust all our actions all our desires, all our sentiments, all our affection to God’s good pleasure...follow Jesus Christ very closely, have His thoughts in our hearts so as to be able to say with St Paul, “I live now, not with my own life, but with the life of Christ Who lives in me,” and to make Him live in us in our state of imperfection.”

Let Him live in us.

Ch.3.9.81 “ So that Jesus Christ may live in us, He must live in our hearts. All the affections of your heart must reflect Jesus Christ: He must live in your mind, so

that He may live in all your actions...He must live in your memory, in your intelligence, in your imagination and in all the faculties of your soul; then He will be reproduced in you: you will be other Christs... Why should Christ not live in us, just as He lived in His saints? “

- Ch.12.3.76 “What did the Risen Christ do?” He established His Church, He finished preparing His Apostles for their mission and for martyrdom, for all were martyred... Where did they find their strength? In their union with their Divine Master. They were the living expression of the Gospel they taught. Jesus Christ lived in them and everything about them spoke of Him. Let us try to express in our own lives the life of Jesus Christ, try to receive from Him that which we should give to others. Let us work to become His apostles, since we are already His brides.”

Share the Master’s destiny.

- Ch. 12.3.76 “ For His apostles, Jesus laid down this condition, which is a sign of love; He offered them the chalice of His Passion to drink...if, in all sincerity, we prepare ourselves to drink from Jesus Christ’s chalice, our life will be transformed.”

- Ch. 5.6.86 “ A sister is an apostle who follows Christ when the actions she performs, the words she says, have this aim: to bring God adorers in spirit and truth.

Receive from Him the Kingdom, the new life.

- Ch.23.2.73 “A sister must become a new creature, transformed in the likeness of our Lord. This is the work of an entire lifetime. On the one hand, uproot anything in our soul which is linked to sin...on the other hand, try to enter into Our Lord’s attitudes, prayers, actions, so as to reproduce them in us. How is this transformation brought about? First of all, by imitation: beginners do not have our Lord dwelling in them other than in the manner common to all souls in a state of grace. It is important that they place themselves in his presence often, that they take Him for their Model. This is done by meditation, the consideration of one or the other facet of our Lord’s life: Jesus in the crib, the Child Jesus, Jesus at Nazareth, Jesus in exile, Jesus in His apostolic life, Jesus such as He is shown in the Gospel, where His actions, His inclinations, His thoughts are shown to us, so that we may be wholly formed on this model.

Having copied Him for one thing, we must go on to another, because in Him are all the virtues. Take humility for example: you see Jesus humble in the Host, humble in His obedience to creatures, above all, humble in the adorable mystery of His sufferings on the Cross... (cf. Phil. 3,10) For you, humility will come through your effort to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, to be like Him and at the same time it will grow through your efforts to put His call into practise: Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart (Mt. 11,29). I’ve cited humility, but take poverty, gentleness – the principle is the same. For us, the final justification of all virtue is the imitation of our Lord, in whom we find all of them.

...A moment comes when things become simpler, when we no longer feel the need to follow a particular method or acquire one virtue or another, but where the soul simply tries to let our Lord live in her, where she forgets herself, empties herself, seeking only Jesus' action in her. Our soul is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ wishes to dwell therein. He is certainly entitled to dwell in our soul/.../Because we lack the recollection, faith and fervour necessary to let Jesus Christ live in us, it happens that we fail to reproduce Him... We must beg for this attention, this application, which permits us to hand ourselves over to Jesus Christ, that He may live in us."

Ch. 31.8.84 "In order to sanctify ourselves, we have to be sufficiently free to keep our attention on Our Lord and to try to imitate Him. When we allow our ego to yield to impressionability, we are not sufficiently our own master, not free to copy our Lord. He himself tells us: "Your patience will win you your lives."(Lk.21,19) I charge you, let nothing prevent you from keeping our Lord before your eyes and from accomplishing the resolutions you have taken...no matter what that resolution may be, its goal is the imitation of our Lord in some way: humility, obedience..."

Ch. 14.12.79 "Our Model: it is the Saviour by Whom we are all renewed, He in Whom we were born in Baptism, in whom we should live, since every Christian should be another Jesus Christ... The Church teaches us that all the baptised are buried in Jesus Christ and must live by the new life brought by the Saviour. And all this peace, all this joy which it announces, those magnificent promises that it makes, are not for religious only, but for all the Faithful. Even in ordinary Christian life, we must have the sentiments of Jesus Christ. It is to everyone that St Paul says: "Have the feeling of Jesus Christ." But we, spouses of Jesus Christ, should enter into His feelings in a special manner; and if we are faithful, we will also participate in a more intimate way in all the good that the Church promises. Let us tell Him: "Here I am, O my God, I have come to do your will"...the Canticle is a bit monotonous"; says François de Sales, "but it is the Lamb's, and that is enough for the soul that loves Jesus Christ."

Decrease so that He may increase.

Ch. 3.12.82 "In all my actions it must be Our Lord Who manifests Himself, and that, of all our powers, not one should escape Him..." "He must increase and I must disappear." May it be Him everywhere and always. This is the whole of the religious life: to decrease in order to make the life of Jesus Christ grow and increase in the soul."

Marie Eugénie has a chapter entitled : "The only way to please God is to work at resembling our Lord" and she says:

Ch. 21.2.75 "If, instead of those complicated examens where we waste our time reviewing with disquieting concern each of our actions of the day, where we occupy ourselves with vague considerations, we would say to ourselves: Where am I in the resemblance I should have to Our Lord Jesus Christ? Here, on the one hand, you have the perfect model, divine, so holy, so humble, so poor, so meek,

and at the same time, so strong, so given to others, doing the will of God every hour of the day, always doing what pleased His Father. And for myself on the other hand, where am I in this resemblance to Jesus Christ? Like Jesus, is it faith that governs my relationships with my superiors, with my peers, and with those below me? How much better everything would go!”

Consider this insistence on the relation of Jesus with His Father and the duty of imitating the Lord. This is what the saints did, those friends of Jesus, whom Marie Eugénie propose to us as “friends”, those who, having found Jesus, followed Jesus, followed Him, imitated Him, and who could be found in Him... We are called to produce much fruit: sanctity. M. Marie Eugénie reminds us that what God wants above all is sanctity: He wants to create saints...

Ch. 8.7.73 “When we decide to follow our Lord and to imitate Him, we have to work with Him on some concrete point; without this, we would work in a vacuum or else we won’t work at all. The saints set to work in a very positive and precise manner.”

Ch.10.12.82 “Our Lord is not complete in all His glory until He shines forth on His saints...in the saints the life of Jesus Christ is reproduced under one form for one, under another for another.”

Friends of Jesus.

Ch.13.1.78 “Religious of the Assumption must be evangelical women, who live closely with our Lord and his Holy Mother; they must nourish themselves on the meditation of their mysteries. It is fitting that they make friends with those who on earth were the friends of our Lord Jesus Christ – primarily with the Apostles... then with the women whom the Gospel names when it designates those whom Jesus honoured with a special friendship... Martha and Magdalene; they were friends of our Lord... Since they followed Him during His mortal life, they teach us how to follow him His footsteps and imitate Him. Seek to imitate those who were very much in the heart of Jesus, those whom Jesus loved, and whom He chose as friends... may they make us become, in turn, the friends of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To be friends of Jesus. Follow Him when He calls. Leave everything, imitate His works, leave what we are to become what He is. We have to change ourselves into new creatures, transform ourselves into His likeness. It is the work of a lifetime. This transformation is effected primarily by imitation, and so we must stay constantly in the presence of Jesus, our Model; meditate His life as the Gospel presents it to us: His actions, His inclinations, His thoughts, His attitudes. In Him we find all the virtues: Marie Eugénie insists on humility, obedience, His total self-oblation to His Father. If we follow Christ faithfully, live with Him, we will no longer think of ourselves; we forget ourselves, empty ourselves out before God, Jesus acts in our soul. We become another Christ, as were the saints. He gives us the means: His Word, His Body, His Spirit. Thus we go from imitation to union.

His Word...

Ch. 27.6.80 “It is the Word of Jesus Christ that we must return to see if we dwell in Jesus Christ. Now, the Word of Christ is the Holy Gospel, it is there that we have to examine ourselves, quite apart from the consolation we might or might not have. Where are we concerning our Lord’s various teachings in the Gospel? Take the most obvious examples: “Learn of me for I am gentle and humble of heart” – does this word dwell in us? ... “If anyone would follow me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me.”...

The Spirit of the Gospel...

Ch. 14.7.74 “We can spend our whole life studying a flock of pious subjects and still not have the evangelical spirit. What matters above all is to cultivate a manner of judging, of acting, of feeling, of willing in conformity with Jesus Christ and which relates to what He would have done and wanted during His earthly life, and with what He would be, do, feel, wish, if He were in our place. This is what I call the Spirit of the Gospel, that the Gospel become the norm and law of our judgments, of our thoughts and feelings towards God and creatures.”
 “Examine how little there is of the “me” in all that comes from the Gospel, and consider the extent of self-detachment, in all possible forms and occasions, that is required by the evangelical spirit.”

It is at the Eucharist, with the memorial made of Jesus, that the power of God which gives us life, is actualised.

Ch. 6.6.80 “In the Eucharist, eternal life, divine life, is brought into human life. That is the point of contact between eternity and time... What we see, what we adore on the altar is Jesus Christ, risen, immortal, all powerful, king of glory. There is the Lamb, immolated on Calvary, each day of His earthly life, there is the Lamb that the Angels and Saints adore from all eternity, and it is He Himself Who comes to bring the divine condition into this world, risen life, the glorified condition, Heavenly life. All this happens in our hearts, and it is there that our Lord asks our consent to use this for grace, a state of being. Our Lord does not come solely to let us know Him by faith, He comes so that a transformation may be brought ²in us which corresponds with that eternal life, which comes into our souls. After all, how could the condition of our soul not be changed by the frequent reception of Him who is the God of Eternity? ... When our Lord is in us, we can mount even to the inaccessible throne of the Blessed Trinity, borne by Him who is the Omnipotence of the Father, the Word of the Father, the Wisdom of the Father. We can go up to the Blessed Trinity, to adore Him with the Angels and the Saints. And after that, can we believe that Our Lord does not ask our consent, that He doesn’t want our human life transformed, that He does not ask for our Fiat, our Amen, which must be renewed the whole of our life, in such a way as to constitute a state which is more eternal than temporal...”

Ch. 23.2.73 “What infidelity it would be if we did not allow our Lord to speak by our lips, live in our actions, our thoughts, our sentiments, if we were not determined to make any sacrifice, so that by the delicate attention of our love, His life might

² Instead of « wrought » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

be manifested in our mortal lives. Why be in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, unless it is to let the One you adore live more fully in you?

We must abide under the influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.

Ch. 25.8.78 “Our Lord gives us the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us. He gives us His very intimate grace, really marvellous, by the blessed word of His gospel, by His blessings, by His Sacraments and above all by the sacrament par excellence, which is the Eucharist. Everything in us is made so that we can live by the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we must often look and see if our soul is oriented in this direction and in the correct manner... Try to establish your soul in such a state that it can produce – the most continuously possible- sentiments and acts similar to those which the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ formed under the action of the Holy Spirit Who is given to us to be our Spirit.”

The Father says: “This is My Son; hear Him.” Obey the Father as Jesus did, by love, because he is Son...; it is by becoming sons that we imitate Jesus, that we become true worshippers of the Father, and that we make His kingdom come...

Ch.22.2.75 “This is My Beloved Son, hear Him.” If Holy Church recalls this word to us in such a way, it is because for us, everything consists in listening to our Lord, and listening in the two senses given by the Scriptures. – To listen is to obey; it is not only to pay attention with the mind, but to pay attention with the heart. The mind must be filled with truths; it must be filled with the words of the Gospel – with all that our Lord has said, with all that our Lord has done, with all that He taught; then every day we must place before us in meditation some words of that divine life while proposing to imitate it. This is how the mind gets filled with Jesus Christ.
- The attention of the heart, the attention of the will which urges us to do what our Lord tells us to do, what He teaches us, what He shows us. Do not forget that He is the Beloved Son; conformed to Him, we can be the beloved daughters of our Heavenly Father. If we want to please God, let us enter into that divine filiation which will make us agreeable in His eyes, but remember that it is only possible by that resemblance to Jesus Christ, the one and only manner of pleasing God.
...Listen to Him, that is to say, fill your heart with His teachings, do what He tells you: listen to Him with that heart’s ear which obtains the culmination of holiness which is Jesus Christ.”

“Listen to Him”, the Father tells us. “Do whatever He tells you” our Mother tells us. Let us Follow their counsel ... as Marie Eugénie proposes to us.

(Chapters of M.M.E)

July 9, 1980

ON THE SPIRIT OF THE ASSUMPTION

(cf. "The imitation of Jesus Christ")

(15th December 1873)

My dear daughters

I have often explained to you that there are many aspects of the spirituality of the Assumption. Today I would like to return to three or four of these and discuss them more fully.

M.Gay defined our Spirit very clearly when he said that, as Religious of the Assumption, we ought to be specially united and attached to the life of the Blessed Virgin which was none other than the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and that, after her example, we should always rise above earthly things, freeing ourselves from them by the "Sursum Corda"! We should always try to remain in this disposition. Whenever things aren't going well, when we are in difficulty and suffering, let us try to climb higher by Faith, by love. This is what the Assumption is for us, my dear daughters; it draws us above all these sufferings and difficulties, all the worries of life, holding us always in a state of Faith, of Hope and of Love of Our Lord.

But another aspect of our life is the spirit of zeal and fervour for the coming of the reign of Our Lord on earth. It is this spirit of eagerness and even of militancy, that characterises the Fathers of the Assumption and which they have formulated in their Constitutions with this word: "Adveniat Regnum Tuum". For us, this spirit of zeal should show itself by our loving labour for Our Lord; by a sense of devotion since we are consecrated to the service of others; and by a filial love of the Church, so that all that belongs to the Church, all that touches it, all that interests it, is for us the object of our thoughts, our desires, our prayer; in short, the incentive of a continual and constant preoccupation.

This is what we have always tried to develop in you and that you must work to increase daily: the desire for the Christian life in oneself and in others; the desire for perfection, in oneself and in others; the desire, in a word, for all that can most glorify Our Lord Jesus Christ and increase His reign in souls.

This leads us to a third aspect of our life which perhaps occupied us the most at the beginning of the foundation when we were so few in number: this is to reproduce the Life of Jesus Christ in ourselves. Certainly, the imitation of the life of Our Lord is necessary to enable us to go beyond nature, to work for the salvation of souls and the extension of the Kingdom; but, as Religious of the Assumption, we must form ourselves very especially after this Divine Model. There are many places in the Rule which recommend this; saying that the best means of preserving the spirit of our Congregation, is to apply ourselves constantly to never saying or doing anything that could not have been said or done by Our Lord or His holy mother.

There was a way of being, of actin, of thinking that was characteristic of Our Lord when He was on this earth. One should often picture what he would do in regard to such matters as health and illness, life and death, friends and enemies, parents and neighbours: in a word, in regard to all creatures and everything and everyone you can imagine, in order to

conform oneself to His example, to form it in oneself ever more perfectly and thus to lead a life that is truly a following of Jesus Christ.

It is true that all Christians should apply themselves to imitating Our Lord, since, in order to enter heaven, all of us must be found conformable to this divine model because the heavenly Father has predestined for Glory those in whom He finds the traits of His Son; but in order to preserve the spirit of Faith, Simplicity and Love of Our Lord, which is the distinctive mark of our Congregation, we have a special duty to study the Divine Model, to imitate and continue His life in us as far as is possible in this world today: to continue it in His zeal, in his actions, in His thoughts, in all the conduct of His life, to the point that when we do some good work, our intention is to continue the good works of Our Lord and to do nothing that His Sacred Humanity wouldn't have been able to do during His mortal life.

Take for example our recitation of the Divine Office. It is certain that Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin often recited the same psalms that we say since the Church puts on our lips these words: "Lord I offer You this prayer in union with the Divine intention which You had when You Yourself chanted the praises of God on this earth." Is there any better intention for the Office than the following of Jesus Christ? We can thus unite ourselves to Him in all our actions, because Jesus lives in us by Grace and by the Eucharist, and it is He Who gives meaning to our prayers and our works.

As the holy body and soul of Our Lord was completely dependent on the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – because there was not a human person in Christ, but the one Divine Person- so we also can place ourselves, by Grace and Love, in a state of dependence on Our Lord, by means of our fidelity to the movements of His Spirit which lives in us as in a temple, and thus by this Divine Action we can perform works of zeal and virtue, which are ever more perfect when we hold ourselves under the influence of our Divine Head. We are members of His living body which is the Church of Jesus Christ on earth, and which, transformed and transfigured, will be united to Him in eternity.

But, in order to arrive at union with Our Lord, one must at first strive to follow Him in dependence and humiliation. This is something I want to repeat: everyone wants to begin with union, but that is like builders who try to start a house from the roof! To reach union, it is absolutely necessary to begin by imitation: you must be penetrated with the Gospel, the thoughts of Our Lord, His words, His actions, and the desire to reproduce them as much as possible in your everyday living.

To want to reach union without passing through the stage of imitation is pure illusion. You might begin with an act of union; but if you don't study the Gospel carefully to see how Our Lord practiced humility, obedience, poverty, simplicity; what He lived at Bethlehem in His hidden life, and His public life; you would risk passing over the means for remaining in union. By an act of love you could be taken there for a moment and that would be very good, but you wouldn't be able to stay there without the sustenance that is so necessary! The thoughts and habits of imitation, drawn from meditation on the life and words of Our Lord in the Gospel.

Speaking like this about union should help you to understand better the spirit that marks our Congregation and our own particular way of tending to perfection.

By holding to these three points of view, I hope to have outlined the particular effort which belongs to a Religious of the Assumption: a constant effort to rise above the things of

this earth; to maintain oneself in the spirit of zeal and love of the Church; and finally the effort to follow Jesus, seeking always in the Gospel the rule and model of our thoughts, words and actions, in order to be united more and more to Our Lord and to let Him live and reign in us much more than ourselves.

9th July 1980

S. Fermina

IMITATION OF CHRIST. BEING ONESELF.

Understanding “imitation” today.

It is a fact that the saints, canonised or otherwise, have always been people who lived with their eyes fixed on Christ.

Long before “The Imitation of Christ” was written, and long after too, the attempt to imitate Christ has given rise to the loftiest forms of Christian living. For, in Christ, there is not a hair’s breadth between the message and the messenger. His life is an exact counterpart of his teaching. It is impossible to say of him: “Do as he says but not as he does”, his own words will never convict him of the lightest inconsistency.

But nowadays, when we are all so preoccupied with the quest of liberty, can we be truly free if we are copy-cats, if we do not venture to be ourselves, to invent our own identity? Our freedom is always being challenged, we are continually required to find new answers. If we set out to follow a pattern, we may be putting on a straight-jacket; imitation may lead to a sterile reduplication. To follow the beaten track, to attempt to reproduce a model, is ultimately to accept petrification, to make no advance. The imitation of Jesus may conceal a secret wish to avoid the trouble and the risks of living. Indeed, “to live” is to be willing to take the risk of making, day by day and minute by minute, “the one step which is enough” (Newman).

Besides, what master would accept such a passive attitude, such mental laziness disguised as fidelity, from his disciples? Certainly not Jesus. Didn’t he compel his disciples to get into the boat, to set off before him in a direction he had not yet taken? Didn’t he say that we would perform greater signs than he had? Didn’t he tell us that after he had left us we would gradually come to navigate in the open sea, reaching the fullness of truth? Some forms of imitation confine us, even, or especially, when they confine us in comfortable quarters...

To suggest that Jesus should be “a practical pattern for living” is to court certain dangers. The greatest is that of compromising the leap of faith by relying instead on a deliberately self-reliant moralism. It is of little importance that the pattern is a person rather than a principle or an abstract theory. If we start talking about a pattern, we make ourselves responsible for conforming to it. Our fidelity to the pattern becomes our own achievement. Then we are back in the area of moral effort. Everything depends on us. Jesus never says: “Imitate me”. He said: “Follow me”. There is a difference.

Nevertheless there is something genuine about the naïve question: “What would Jesus have done in my place, as things now are?” even though it is a question to which there is no real answer.

In spite of possible ambiguities, the attempt to keep Jesus before one’s eyes as one goes about one’s day to day activity is not wholly misconceived. For, unlike any other model one might attempt to imitate, Jesus is indeed the true and only master of desire. To imitate someone is not simply to copy his gestures and attitudes. It is to listen to what his actions tell us about what is desirable. To imitate someone is primarily to try to adopt his desires. The model points to the thing to be pursued. But often enough the imitator is hoping to seize, to

acquire this thing as a piece of personal property; and so to set himself up as the proprietor of what the other saw as the aim of his life, or as his life itself.

If it is possible to imitate Jesus, that is precisely because in him there is no trace of the drive to take possession of anything whatever. "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be seized".

Jesus did not want anything for himself. He was wholly directed towards the Father. He was all desire, that is, love, a love without possessiveness, loving more and more simply for love's sake.

If Jesus draws us to himself, it is not that he is exercising a personal attraction so that he personally may become the object of our desires. He merely brings us to see what it is that we lack.

For his part, he effaces himself: he directs us onward to the Father. He calls on us to turn, like him, towards the Father and towards our brothers.

But there is something we cannot imitate, it is the perfect harmony between the word of God that came to him and the message of his life. He is himself the Word. But in this too he is our pattern. We too have to try to leave no gap between hearing the word and doing it.

For, rather than just a model to be imitated, he is to be obeyed. To obey, with the obedience of faith, is to be attentive to the Word of life.

The real problem is to know "Who is speaking through us?", "Who is speaking and making me speak?" We come to see that our failings and faults are connected with our silencing of that primal speech. We have turned a deaf ear. Then we start listening to some other message, whichever happens to strike us. Others speak through us. There is some other person speaking to us and making us speak who is not our true self. But Jesus never listened to any voice but the Father's. no doubt we shall never reach the stage of being all ear, completely open to the word, echoing it in perfect tune. The interference of other voices will continue. But nevertheless, to be hearers of His word is our lonely "standard".

But the essential is to be quite clear that for Jesus, the Word of God was never a set of commands and injunctions. The Father never said: "Do that" and he did it, "Come" and he came. Jesus admired the faith of the centurion, but the relation of Jesus to his Father was quite different. The Father said one thing to him: "You are my son". Sonship, the liberty of the Son, that is the unstandardized "standard" of behaviour we find in Jesus.

At the Transfiguration, the three disciples heard this declaration as Jesus himself understood it and lived by it. They heard the words which are addressed to us too: "Hear him". To imitate Jesus is to listen to him as he listened to the Father. From now on the Father is silent. We are left alone with Jesus, like the disciples on the mountain. The Father is Silence. From now on we hear only Jesus.

He has only a few things to tell us: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." (Mc 6,50). It is enough to live by. Beyond our fears, it is up to us to discover our own paths to freedom. Our failures, after all, are probably linked to our fears, the fear of missing out on life, of letting

slip offered³ happiness, easy satisfaction. The “It is I” in the midst of the storm, the coming of Jesus among men, this is the “Good News”. This is the promise of happiness. Jesus is the happy man. He is the man of the Beatitudes. He is the fortunate man in whom the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. What he has come to bring us is the secret of true happiness, by sharing his own. To follow him, to become his disciple, is to discover true happiness.

But here the impossibility of imitating him through any unaided effort of ours becomes obvious. We cannot, by our own “apply” the Beatitudes. They are not an updating of the Ten Commandments. They are promises, not a list of duties. There is no law, the Gospel is not a new law. All is grace. The Gospel renews the law. It fulfills the promise.

Only the Spirit of Christ can enable us to live with his life. The very life of the Son. No-one can set out to imitate it. It is enough to dwell in it.

“I live now, not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me”, says Paul. What does he mean by saying that it is not his own life? He is alive. But his life has not its source in himself, it comes from another than himself. No- one can, on his own, break free of the “self” in which he is imprisoned. And yet...it may be that we may start to live without looking over our shoulder to watch ourselves doing it, to love without being in love with our own loving. Then the “self” vanishes, forgotten, dissolved, and Life dawns, brand new and free. The power of loving that splits its narrow chrysalis in this way comes from Another. My part is simply to leave him a free hand, to get out of his way.

Christ is inaccessible, buried in the mystery of God, but he is also present and active through the power of his death and resurrection, the power to destroy the body of this death. Through him I live.

“I live now, not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me”. With Christ I am crucified, but the crucified is alive. He is living, He lives in me. I am the “where” where He completes his living. What is destroyed is the self, the will to self-sufficiency. Through fait we have to break the closed circle of our egoism to accept the freely accorded and saving love of the Son of God. But what is broken is not life. Paul became one of the living!

³ Instead of « proffered happiness » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

M. Hélène Marie

July 10, 1980

PERFECT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST – HUMILITY

“O God, when shall I learn to be humble?” (Vol. I,27-28)

This was Marie Eugénie’s cry at 20. It was like the first sharp note of a musical theme which was never to come to an end. Today we are going to consider what humility meant to her, taking as our starting point the Chapter of April 7, ’78: “Perfect love of Jesus Christ – Humility.” I shall refer to other chapters too, as well as to her letters, to her private notes and to her conversations.

First, I shall examine the relationship between humility and love, which she thought of as central to its significance, and then how this led on to the need to accept humiliation, next her account of the characteristics of humility, and finally the connection between humility and the mystery of the Assumption.

HUMILITY AND LOVE

When in the course of her series of Chapters on the Spirit of the Assumption, Marie Eugénie came to speak of “The Perfect Love of Jesus Christ” and the virtues in which it finds expression, she started with humility, since as she said, though humility arises from the knowledge of God and of oneself “I cannot help relating the unaffected, heartfelt, joyful humility of a true daughter of the Assumption directly to love. “This is a long way from the masochistic appetite for humility for its own sake; it is for the love of Jesus and through his love, that Marie Eugénie desires humility for herself and for us. “All my longing is for a humility which springs from love.” (1.42.38) Admitting that humility is necessary to all Christians and to all religious, she claims a special shade of it as peculiarly ours: “Acquaintance with the things of God, adoration, love: these are the springs of your humility.” (7.4.78, p.73) She approached the problems in her own life by the light of this conviction. She wrote to Fr. d’Alzon: “I think it is lack of humility which prevents my heart from being on fire with the love of Jesus Christ.” (12.26-26- 57) Jesus is to be preferred to all else: “Never commit the folly of putting one’s dignity before the joy of being with Jesus through meekness and humility”. (2.236). this is the same single-minded love of God as that expressed in the phrase from St. Augustine which Marie Eugénie quotes several times: ‘the love of God carried to the point of scorn of self’: this is a love whose nature it is “to offer God all honour, all praise, and all blessing in all that you do, without reflecting any of the credit back on yourselves or on any other creature.” (7.4.78, p.74) It is with this aim of emptying herself to leave room for God, that she set to work on her own temperament and resolved “to try to acquire an inner humility, a habit of accepting things, of accommodating myself to events, of taking them in the spirit Christ brought to his sufferings.” It was in fact the thought of Jesus suffering and humiliated which made Marie Eugénie want to respond to love by love. “How can we answer Christ, who, for his part, has shown us his love by an immeasurable abasement. . . . Our Saviour’s love brought him to the depths of self-annihilation that we cannot equal.” (7.4.78, p.72-73)

She herself experienced the attraction of which she speaks: “I have become aware of a powerful charm in the thought of Jesus poor, humble and loving. . . it is my heart which is drawn towards him, as in the days of its youth, these are not efforts of the will.” (12.2577-56) It is by letting him live in her, that Marie Eugénie hopes to reach him: “Jesus Christ is an

abyss of humility and I, of vanity...How can these two extremes meet, unless I allow him to live, in everything, in me.” (Retreat, 1842)

And so it is through love, by looking at Jesus, by allowing him to live in her, that Marie Eugénie learns, and asks us to learn, humility. This, too, is what the Rule of Life of 1970 asks of us in the chapter on Humility: “As we profess to love Jesus Christ, we want to share his attitudes and feelings” (24) and a little further on: “The love of Jesus Christ urges us to choose as he did, to love all that is lowly and hidden” (26) and this because “our center is elsewhere” (25).

In this way in 1980 we find ourselves repeating the very first recommendation of the Abbé Combalot in the Introduction to the Constitutions: “Other Congregations will surpass you in austerities, in silence, in strictness of enclosure, in works of mercy, in prayer, in fasting, but none should surpass you in humility of spirit and of the heart.” (p.20)

FROM HUMILITY TO HUMILIATION.

It is just when Marie Eugénie comes to speak of love, in her chapter of April 7, 1878, that she passes from the consideration of humility to teaching on humiliation, as being the way of pleasing God and of reaching intimacy with him: “As for you, you want to please Our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what is that pleases him the most?...it is not simply humility but actual acceptance of humiliation...He converses with the simple soul, his dwelling is in the humble soul...and so, here is another characteristic of love... what draws hum is humility and the love of one’s poverty and weakness. Not only must you be ready to choose the lowest place, but prepare yourself to welcome humiliation, when it presents itself, as something which pleases Our Lord infinitely, which draws him to dwell in you with the fullness of his love...to grant you his choicest graces.” (p. 74-75-76)- Do not misunderstand me, God is not a perverse deity taking pleasure in the self-abasement of his creatures; on the contrary, for Marie Eugénie he is “the Infinite Good who tends to give himself”, he is “the deep, calling to the deep.” He is the Power made perfect in our weakness. So, this humility is not the pallid virtue of the weak, taking advantage of their weakness, of their insignificance. It has nothing to do with self-contempt or powerlessness. For us, humility is the virtue of the strong, a joyful gratitude for the power which sets up its dwelling at the heart of our weakness. It has nothing in common with resignation, that anti-Christian word which appears nowhere in Scripture. It is love which makes us choose freely to humble ourselves before God, which drives us to imitate Jesus, the Son, “whose state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself, to assume the condition of a slave.” (Phil. 2,6-7) this is very much what Marie Eugénie tells us in her teaching and in her life. First, in her teaching: on March 30, 1879, she asks us to “consider the Passion from the point of view of the humiliations of the Saviour”. (p.311) From her experience as a woman and a foundress, she is realistic about the tendencies of living things, at no matter what level: “The creatures of this world, all seek some sort of pre-eminence, want to have some sort of worth, of importance this feeling is noticeable not only in men, I have even seen it in a horse. It impressed me very much: he was called Negro and because he was handsome, nicely proportioned and had a beautiful black tail, he thought himself above the others. When he was not in front, he would bite those who tried to pass him. So, you can see that the demand for consideration, the wish to have the first place, is not a very noble one...” (15.7.81,p.160-161) She is also realistic about what there is in man: “Human nature, that strange thing, dreads humiliation, in a manner of speaking, even more the pain, sacrifice and suffering. It seems as if being humiliated, being considered as

nothing, being abandoned, is the greatest of human suffering. Our Lord willed to make it his own, so completely, in so extraordinary a way, that we cannot but stop to consider it.” (p. 311) And further on: “When something comes along that humbles us, that brings us down in the world, that strips us of our pretensions, should we, as religious, get into a state of anxiety? They think that Sister So-and- So has done ill, what if they think so! They thought of Our Lord as a hypocrite, a criminal – they will never think anything like that of any one of us. They may say: “Sister X is a fool”, but people do not readily say: “ She is a criminal or a hypocrite.” We worry about much slighter criticisms. If we had a great devotion to the humiliations of Our Lord, we would not get anxious, should maintain our peace, our tranquillity, our silence, in all circumstances.” (p. 317) and I cannot resist going on to quote the next paragraph: “Silence – that difficult thing – because so many people have such an enormous need to talk, when they fancy that people have a little less esteem for them than they deserve. When someone has snubbed us, allowed themselves to think that we were mistaken in this or that, many of us are inclined to make great long speeches: Our Lord kept silence when he was despised, insulted, humiliated, scorned” (p.317-318) “To become holy, we have to accept being supposed in the wrong even when we think we are right. Anyone who accepts only the tribulations – great or small- which he deserves, will not make progress, St. Therese says.” (8549-87)

So much for the teaching which Marie Eugénie gives us: now, through quotations taken from each stage, let us see how she put it into practice. In 1839, from her Retreat Notes: “To rejoice in the little opportunities for suffering, humiliations and subjection... When I rejoice of being scorned... I shall come confidently to Christ, ‘Come to Me, you who are burdened.’ I shall be sure that he is humble enough to come to me, meek enough to welcome me... I really want to convert myself, to give you glory by setting myself at the level of my nothingness, to make known the immensity of your mercy to me, by being content to be known and despised. I want to begin my novitiate in earnest, to be really poor, to humble myself...” In 1848, she writes to Fr. d’Alzon: “I need to cast down all my haughtiness” (10.1923-48). The following year, on June 2, 1849: “ I have asked God to give me a humble and hidden life... to love to be of little importance in the congregation and to rid myself of the inclination to hold on the position which I consider due to my rank of superior, to be the object of little esteem and personal consideration.” On March 5, 1851, Marie Eugénie feels the need of being directed by “ a person who will reproach me, humiliate me, command me, try me”, so that “her vice of odious self-sufficiency” may diminish. And on that same day, she notes, in her eight-day retreat: “Today, March 5th, I have just made the Stations of the Cross, and it seems to me that God has spoken very strongly to me, and opened my heart so that it may break and weep over its pride. O my God, why am I forever preoccupied with myself, with whether people are kind to me, whether they are difficult, whether they are going to make things awkward for me... etc. shall I never be able to come to rest in a real scorn of myself... and then, in my dealings with my dear Father, admit that I am in the wrong and ask forgiveness. It seems to me that my retreat resolutions ought to be: to try to remain serene by being very humble-minded, by great care and great courage to humble myself in practical ways, care to do this in small things constantly, courage to do it, regardless of what others think, whenever I am at fault; what does it matter if my sisters look down on me.”

In her retreat of the following year: “Work at becoming humble, at accepting humiliations and desiring them.” In 1860, she writes: “I am drawn to adore Our Lord in the excess of his sufferings and in the excess of his humiliations... I am very much in need of this lesson. Grace calls me to practice humility and seek out humiliations” (13.2790-60). And at the time of the Affair Véron, in 1866: “I have learned that at the archbishop’s house it is said

that I am spiteful and torment the sisters. To such accusations, only a General Chapter can answer. Besides I only need as much reputation as it pleases Our Lord to preserve for me and apart from a twinge of physical pain when violent things were said to me (you know that I have always had a physical fear of violence) since then, my heart has been at ease.” (16.3762-65) I could go on quoting – there is such a wealth of material. Painful years followed: the growth of the Congregation, the doubts of the Church about her, the illness of Mère Thérèse Emmanuel, the difficulties with the Fathers, the risk of division. Marie Eugénie accepted all these humiliations.

In 1884, her interpretation was simply this: “It seems to me that all these humiliations have made me a little more humble and I thank God for it. As Psalm 118 says: “It was good for me to have to suffer, the better to learn your statutes.” (Ps. 118,71)

Perhaps we were happy with the first part of this account: the section on humility and love: how do we feel about this second section, where Marie Eugenie tells us that the love of Jesus urges us to love, choose and accept humiliation? Isn't this what many of us sang on the morning of our Profession: “Elegi abjecta esse...” “I have chosen to be the least in the house of the Lord, whom I have seen, whom I love, in whom I have believed, to whom I have given my love.”

Do you think the Rule of Life evades this aspect of humility? No. “We are ready to welcome injustice and humiliation with gentleness and serenity, finding in them a means of communion with Jesus Christ and of following in his footsteps.” (26)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMILITY ACCORDING TO MARIE EUGENIE

In the chapter of April 7, 1878, Marie Eugénie has three pages (71,72,73) describing the characteristics of humility. She first affirms that the humility of a daughter of the Assumption ought to be sincere: this word recurs seven times in these short pages. She also adds other synonyms: “true”, “frank”, “in good faith”. She develops this point in two places : “Humility must be sincere, because love will not be cheated : and to whom should be true, if not to him who searches the very depths of our hearts, who sees if everything in them is his, or if we are keeping some corner for our own honour, our own self- esteem, something, in short, which is directed towards our own satisfaction.” (p.72) For the light of Jesus to reach down to the depths of our heart, to dig down into our heart, and humility= truth, transparence, depends on a decision which must be continually renewed and is characteristic of a human being anxious to live honestly before God, with God, and in God. In a second place, on p.77, Marie Eugénie explains in a well-known passage what sincere humility is: “We should not just be humble in words, speeches, and looks, but in our very hearts, offering ourselves unreservedly, welcoming Jesus Christ who has proved his love for us by accepting humiliation.” This is related to straightforwardness, another characteristic of humility distinguished by Marie Eugénie (71). This is what psychologists of today term “the death of the artificial personality”: to live, to advance, we must cease to act a part, the self which is all mask and Sunday clothes must be set aside so that the real “I”, the seed of the Word in my inmost self, may be born.

Marie Eugénie also insists on the fact that “humility gives real joy...”(R.L.27). She comments a little further on: “We often think that humility is a dispiriting virtue. What is there dispiriting about what I have just said? Is it dispiriting to follow Our Lord, to offer him our heart, to adopt the means by which he can be found, to make our relationships with him more tender and more intimate? Would it be dispiriting to retain our peace of soul at such a

price?”(p.76). There is no room here for the paranoic, the self-appointed victims, the false prophets of the would-be persecuted. It is obvious that Marie Eugénie wants a “joyous humility” for the Assumption (p.71). “And so, they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name” (Acts 5,41). This is the humility which will ensure our freedom (p.73) so that we do not live under the gaze of men, but of God, not in subjection to a false self-image but in truth, not according to a sentimental mysticism or in a cringing way, but so as to live erect before God, in the Spirit of the Son, because humility, “fruit of the Spirit, fosters praise and thanksgiving.” (R.L. 27). To make ourselves humble, is to be ready to become the son of him who can only see us through the face of his Son. But if Jesus was the Man who was really Free, as we rightly like to think of him today, it is because before his Father and before men, he was able to say: “I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11). Real, sincere, joyful, unaffected humility, is the secret of freedom.

In her letters, Marie Eugénie lists other characteristics of our humility: “Believe me, humility is the sovereign remedy for our ills, a sincere, gentle humility which leads us to say, straight out, all that we ought to say, and do all that is desired of us. You know that when I saw you were discouraged, I used always to say that there was a basis of pride in it. You must have more pride than you think; keep on asking Our Lord constantly for the grace to root it out completely.” (to Sr. Aloysia – 8469-57)

To a girl who was going to enter the community at Nîmes: “Sincere, gentle, trustful humility based on spiritual motives, is the middle, the beginning and the end of religious perfection. It is this which makes us flexible in the hands of God, ready to be moulded into all the virtues that he expects of us.” (L. 1474-1846)... “Without humility, that blessed virtue, what can we expect? And with it, what can we not do? Of course, I mean a humility full of confidence in God, valiant to undertake work, courageous and empty of self. This is the greatest treasure we can have in the religious life; we shall not obtain it without going through many trials.” (5049-56) From retreat notes when she was 79: “Give me grace to be humble so that I may not be discouraged.” (8550-77) Marie Eugénie also adds that it establishes us in peace (p.77 to 79), gives us hope and light (p.79). She herself wrote to Fr. d’Alzon on the Feast of St. Catherine of Siena: “You are he who is and I am she who is not’, I cannot begin to tell you what rest I found in this Infinite power of God and my total powerlessness.” (9.1818-47) And, not without humour, a propos of “Southern hot-heads”, “mostly cracked”: “Let us pray God to keep our heads and let us try to persuade those who are willing to listen to us, to work all their lives at becoming just plain humble; it is the only way to be sure of keeping heads screwed on straight”. (L.5519-1867) At the root of the defection of Sr. Marie de la Nativité: “I find a lack of humility, something over-assertive and over-confident in her”. (L.995-1880) So, for Marie Eugénie, fidelity and perseverance are among the fruits of humility.

At the following chapter 14,1878, Marie Eugénie again said a few words about humility: “The love of Jesus Christ must give us the constancy to work at this all the days of our life, otherwise we shall not be humble.” (p.80-81) In an undated note, we can see Marie Eugénie “working” at herself: “As for humility, I must try to understand that Jesus is the author of what is said of me, of what I succeed in...and that, if I take the credit to myself, he might stop making it his business, blessing it.”

Finally, humility, for Marie Eugénie, is linked to conformity to the will of God. “There exists a strong relationship between humility, love and conformity to the will of God.” And she comments on St. Ignatius’ three degrees of humility which are degrees of love and of conformity with the will of God.

Such, then, is the humility that Marie Eugénie envisaged for us. She liked to observe that, according to St. Paul, humility is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and is listed next to faith. These two attitudes are really allied, being both attitudes of openness to God, of confident submission to his grace and to his word.

HUMILITY AND THE MYSTERY OF THE ASSUMPTION

“The mind, the soul, the heart of a Religious of the Assumption must try to follow the Blessed Virgin, raised to Heaven by a humility never equalled on earth. Mary is the most perfect of creatures; she is also the most humble of all creatures. God regarded the lowliness of his handmaid and that is why he exalted her.” (7.4.78,p.71.72) And a little further in this same chapter: “ You are daughters of the Assumption, you should not descend to pride and self-love, but the love of Jesus ought to raise you to scorn of yourselves.” (p.74) Once again I remind you that the ‘scorn of yourselves’ (p.74) means a preference for God over self. Marie Eugénie said this even before the foundation, in her very first vision of a congregation dedicated to the Assumption: “this mystery is the mystery of her glory, which fills us with joy and is a prop and a consolation to our weakness.” (2.161.88) Besides, isn’t this the spirit of the Rule of Life which tells us, at the end of the Introduction that Mary “allowed the Trinitarian life gradually to pervade her whole being, until the moment when the glory of God broke through her weakness into the mystery of the Assumption.”

And on Assumption Day, 1846, Marie Eugénie reviewed her meditation in a letter to Fr. d’Alzon: “I sought to contemplate the attitudes of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin in today’s mystery...I was especially struck by the extreme humility of the Blessed Virgin; the humility of her love was at the heart of what so powerfully drew Jesus to her... the contemplation of her soul, so gentle, humble, absorbed in God, simple and stripped of earthly concerns did me more good than any other prayer.” (9.1757-46)

Finally, I would like to say that Marie Eugénie thought of “humility as the foundation of any kind of spiritual life”(p.71), “the only solid foundation for perfection” (p.73). If it is the only foundation for everything, it must also be that of the Assumption: “I have sometimes heard it said that humility is not the outstanding virtue at the Assumption. I cannot accept that and I would regret it very much. I believe, on the contrary, that humility must be the fundamental virtue at the Assumption, but it is to be considered as an aspect of love, of confidence, of the fullness of Faith.” (7.4.78, p.76-77)

And here is one last quotation from Marie Eugénie. The last thing she did as Superior General was to give the chapter of December 16, 1894, which was entitled: “To renew ourselves in poverty, chastity, obedience, made easier by humility.” This was her final message. She had said: “ There must be a great example of humility in the Congregation; it will be given.” And we know at what price it was given. Towards the end, she prayed St. Joseph that he would obtain for “my children and for me, a little humility.” To the novices, as directive for Advent: “Be very humble, so that Christ will be drawn to dwell in you.” (O. IV, p.518)

July 11, 1980

JESUS IN RELATION TO HIS FATHER

S. Asuncion

For three days we have been deepening our knowledge, through prayer and reflection, of the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the Jesus who breaks into life, in my life and who says: "Come, follow me." We have already looked at some aspects of following him and at the concrete commitment which is signified. Today we will try to come a little closer to the mystery hidden in him, source and dynamism of his life, final revelation of the being of God. We have a guiding thread: the Gospel of John, contemplation and theological reflection on the person of Jesus and his work. Let us allow ourselves to be taken beyond words, beyond the logic of human reason, by the Spirit who alone can lead us into the heart of God.

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS TURNED TOWARD GOD" (Jn,1,1)

These are the first words of the Gospel of John, clear, concise and yet incomprehensible, which announce the Good News, the design of Love for man. They are also the presentation of a man, Jesus, whose life was linked in such a particular manner to God who made him Someone unique, original, other.

My plan is not to undertake a treatise in Christology, to show how Jesus was God, but to underline the profound attitude of Jesus before God. "In the beginning...the Word was turned towards God." We are able to understand the meaning of that expression, of all that it evokes of direction taken in a life, of attention, of attentiveness, of love. The one towards whom one turns becomes the benchmark⁴, the point of reference, the source and the goal of life and activity. "He came from God and he is going towards God" (Jn 13,3) John will say of Jesus at the hour of his passage. These two words "turned towards" show also the nature of the relationship; first, that a relationship exists, then that the relationship expresses a way of being of God and of Jesus, always referring one to the other.

The Word is also "the Word which speaks to God" from all eternity the plenitude of his creative plan which he is pressed to realise in Jesus, the God who is begotten and to whom the Father communicates his very life. To speak of a plan, of creation here helps us to understand another dimension of God: his openness, the expansive élan of his love which he pours out on men. A dimension which we need to keep in mind, like a back drop, throughout this meditation on the Son.

"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON" (Jn 3,16)

Jesus is the gift of God's love to humanity. This categorical and precise affirmation runs throughout John's Gospel. It has a very particular connotation for it is an echo of Gn.22,2. God acts in the same way as Abraham who was capable of giving up his own son, "his only son". This gift was made in the past and it takes flesh all along the life of Jesus to the time when his HOUR was come to show the fullness of the love of God, the total gift of himself to communicate life.

⁴ Instead of « repair » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

“God has sent His only Son into the world.” “He has sent his Son as a victim of expiation”, John will say in his first letter (4,4-10). Paul has grasped the same depth of the love of God: “He has not spared his own Son but he has delivered him up for us all” (Rom.8,32). How incomprehensible the heart of God! Shall we dare to go closer to him?

There are in these citations three verbs which convey a kind of progression, an increasing intensity which implies a disconcerting reality, almost a scandal: God gives, sends, delivers up his own Son. This is the last thing one could imagine: a father who re-creates himself continually in his son, his likeness, the object of his love and of his good pleasure.

God the Father made Jesus his only Son, the God who is begotten in giving him the plenitude of his Spirit which is his richness and his glory. Through love, the Father has given him all that he has. The Son is his heir and everything is in his hand. He has given him his own life and the power to give life. The Father has placed everything in the hands of his Son and has shown him everything he has done. He has shown him his love.

What is the nature of that love which delivers itself up –victim-like- to death? One thing is evident: the reality which is hidden in him made a deep impression upon the first christians who have handed it down to us through two sources – Paul and John. It puts in relief at the same time that it speaks to us of the originality – the complete otherness of the God of faith. He is nothing like the gods of other religions. He acts in an entirely different way. Unpredictable. Instead of defending what belongs to him, God gives up. We cannot see here a lack of love or of indifference. The handing-over of his Son is rather a kind of “weakness” of God. God is like that when men take from him what he loves most and which is most his – he gives it up, he hands it over.

“THE FATHER LOVES ME BECAUSE I LAY DOWN MY LIFE TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN.” (Jn 10, 17)

Jesus is conscious of being Son, the only Son of the Father and he experiences within himself the Father’s love. Jesus spoke little of himself also of his relationship with his Father, but his life is very revelatory for it is that which expresses which speaks and which makes God present. I want to take several elements of his life to go over aloud with you. The elements which help to know someone, which give a sense to that life and to that mission: prayer, relationship to God, one’s attitude in the face of life and death.

Jesus was a good Jew of his day. He lived the traditions, the laws, the customs of his people. The first thirty years of his life followed that course. Hardly an event, at the age of twelve, which would allow us to guess his particular relationship with God: “Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?” (Lk 2,49) Once his public life was begun, the distance he took from his people and its institutions was more and more evident – to the point of no return. The innovations he introduced were radical under an insignificant appearance – a new way of calling on God, a new way of being in his presence and a new way of being for those men who make others think that Jesus is in himself a difficult new reality to explain.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Jesus took part in worship. He prayed the psalms in the synagogue but he never offered a sacrifice. He denounced the “traffic” in the temple for he knew the limits and the risks of sacrificial religion. For him true worship is spiritual. God seeks man, not sacrifices.

It is the private prayer of Jesus which best reveals his mystery. Jesus prays a lot, alone, apart, on the mountain when everyone is looking for him; however, he is not obsessed with prayer, he does not seek it out of a desire for intimacy with the Father. His prayer is bound up with mission and the education of his apostles. However, it is the “Our Father” which is the center of his prayer – “Let yourself be known as God; bring your kingdom about; let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mt 6,9-10) His desire, and ours, in alignment with God’s desire. This is the meaning of his priestly prayer. (Jn 17)

His prayer is also gratitude and praise. “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...” (Mt 11, 15 ff) because all things are good, all is grace, and you always hear my prayer.

But his special prayer is “ABBA”- it is with this intimate and familiar word which only a trusting child uses when he begins to discover and to express in a stammering manner his love and assurance that Jesus addresses God his Father. Jesus lives as Son before the Father. He calls him “Abba” and then he speaks of God as Father. Jesus did not proclaim to the four winds the joy of his life but only to his disciples whom he initiated into his mystery and, at the same time, unveiled for them the meaning of his final suffering.

“Abba” is surely the most heavily laden word in the New Testament from the point of view of theology. It is the word which reveals for us the deepest mystery of Jesus who dared call on God with this word, an expression of greatest familiarity and with which he lets us understand the consciousness he has of himself and the secret of his being. “Abba” reveals for us the vital principle which directed the life of Jesus and which made him “live as Son”. It also reveals the profound co-penetration and the revealing role of Jesus: if Jesus calls God “Father”, it is because he knows himself to be Son; at the same moment when he speaks of God as Father, he says he is Son. Jesus is the only Son whose mission it is to create the closeness of knowledge and love between God and men. He calls himself The Only Son, the one who knows God in the way a son knows his father and who his known by God as a father knows his son: “I go to my Father who is your Father.”(Jn 20,17) it is in him that we are able to say: “Our Father”.

JESUS LOOKS AT HIS LIFE.

One striking note in John’s Gospel is the awareness Jesus had of his life and mission. He received all from his Father. The Father has given him his riches, his glory (Jn 1,14). He has given his power to freely dispose of everything he has (Jn 3,34). He has taught him all he knows in such a way that the activity of Jesus is like his own – “What the Father does, the Son does equally.” (Jn 5,19)

Jesus is conscious also of another aspect of that fundamental dependence. “The Son can do nothing of himself.” (Jn 5,19) “I can do nothing by myself.” (Jn 5, 30). His mission is not his personal undertaking. (Jn 7,28;8,42) He seeks in everything the will of the one who sent him(id). What he teaches “does not come from him.”(Jn 7,16-18) He does not talk about himself- “... What I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me.” (Jn 12,49) Through Jesus, it is the Father who is doing his work. (Jn 14,10)

Accepting that Jesus' life is imbued⁵ with fidelity and filial dependence towards his Father, always turned towards him, Jesus is the free man who acts with assurance and authority in every instance. He is free and he confronts the realities and existing structures whose powerlessness and limits he knows. He is free with regard to the law, incapable in itself of saving. He is free to go to the poor, the sick, the sinful and announce to them the Good News of a God who loves them in him. Assurance and authority when Jesus calls, "Follow me", when he condemns, when he forgives; an assurance and authority which he has from this intimate knowledge of the Father, of his communion with him, of the certitude he has of being able to judge and to give life "so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses; for the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgment to the Son." (Jn 5,21 ff) Because Jesus knows who he is and states it with the power of his works and his words: "Amen, amen, I tell you." (13 times in Mark, 30 in Matthew, 6 in Luke, 25 in John). He is the presence which confronts, the word directed to man's heart, capable of completely changing his life.

JESUS LOOKS AT HIS DEATH.

The public life of Jesus has been one long route towards Jerusalem, the scene where his "Hour" takes place, when the work which his Father gave him will be accomplished. (Jn 17,4) It is facing this hour, "the hour to pass from this world to his Father" (Jn 13,1), that Jesus shows the extent of his love and of his freedom. Love and fidelity to the Father in a filial obedience which knows no weakening. Love towards his own for whom he gives himself up. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." (Jn 15, 9) Total liberty in the gift of himself: "No one takes it (my life) ; I lay it down of my own free will." (Jn 10,18) That is why "the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again." (Jn 10,17)

In his acceptance of his death, Jesus lives fully the mystery of his sonship. Here he manifests his identity with the Father. The Father is the one who loves to give life in the communication of his life. His plan, his design is to give life to humanity. Jesus makes this his project and his plan. At his baptism, when he hears: "You are my beloved Son, all my pleasure rests in you" (Mk 1,11), he receives from the Father and the Spirit that mission. His identity as Son makes Jesus the participant and object of the Father's love, a continually active love because of the incessant action of the Spirit in him, a love which leads him to total gift.

In this letting go of his life, Jesus takes it up because to give oneself means to be in possession of the fullness of one's being. Instead of losing himself, he becomes his fullest self – Son of God. By giving himself he participates in the same dynamism of the Father and in that way, he lives out his sonship. Even more, his readiness to die shows his love of the Father – "...but the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me. Come now, let us go." (Jn 14, 30) Such is the command he received from him (Jn 10,18). His last and fullest act of love on the cross is also his meeting with the Father. In his death, Jesus shows a love equal to the Father's.

Jesus went through anguish and suffering to acceptance of death. Gethsemane is the proof. Jesus is terrified before the cup the Father offers him but in trust and abandon he "learns obedience through his sufferings." (He 5, 8) He knows that the Father is "greater than he" (Jn 14,28) and he submits completely obedient to the Father's will. Here, at Gethsemane,

⁵ Instead of « shot through » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

at the heart of his prayer, when God's will reveals itself with all its force and weight that Jesus, once more, calls on his Father: "Abba" (Mk 14,36), using that word which we know expresses the kernel of Jesus' relationship with God, a relationship in which he knows he is accepted in trust and which at the same time asks for fidelity and obedience. In Jesus the bond which unites him to the Father is not broken, and God reveals himself as Father in the abandonment of the cross and in the glory of the resurrection. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again." (Jn 10,17)

" BUT TO ALL WHO DID ACCEPT HIM, HE GAVE POWER TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD." (Jn 1,12)

Saint Paul says it in another way- "...those...he intended to become true images of his Son..." (Rm 8, 29) . Such is our call and our vocation. In Jesus, the Son, the Only Son, we become, in our turn, children of God. In him, we have the power to be and to act as he did. He has given us his love, his Spirit, without measure. And in this Spirit who is deep within us, we also can cry out: "Abba, Father!" (Rm 8, 15) and live the gift of ourselves in trust and abandon.

CONCLUSION.

We know well that such a theme as this is inexhaustible. Its expression always remains partial and incomplete but we must bring it to an end or better still, leave the door open to try to come closer to this mystery not only in thought but especially in life. At the same time that you are reflecting upon Jesus before his Father, you may take the texts of Marie Eugénie which I will give you to see how she lived her sonship in confidence and abandon.

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ABANDONMENT AND CONFIDENCE

(cf. "Jesus in relation to His Father")

Extracts from the Private Writings of M.M. Eugénie.

"How can I worry about anything? Rather I should have a great confidence because God always comes to my aid as if by miracle. He has never allowed me to be violently shaken except when I had all the resources needed to be victorious." (161.37)

"It is true, when after Faith, I had found love, all these things paled before me; I wanted everything to be silent..." (Idem)

"... By myself, can I arrive at truth, can I give myself the faculties that seem to have left me? Oh no! I won't disturb the sacred repose where Our Lord seems to allow me to sleep on His breast, and when the time to awake comes, I will delight to find myself small and weak, since He doesn't want me any bigger." (Idem)

"There is no end to love or truth, we nourish ourselves on it daily without ever being satisfied; we will always desire more; and when we say that it is only the 'Impenetrable' which stops us, we have come to the point of hitting up against the mysteries of this love and truth. No, without unveiling the Incomprehensible, the field is always endless before us, and every day God opens the way for us to take a few steps, manifesting before our eyes some aspect of His marvellous harmony; which enchants and subjugates us. He gives us the daily bread of love and truth and everyday He sends some new thought into our mind, a sentiment which delights our heart and is exactly what is needed for our weakness at that moment; for His treasures are inexhaustible and His graces vary to suit our misery of each day." (154. after April 37)

"...I, who am normally so cold, so distracted, so dry, who never felt the need to pray, whose soul seemed far from the Divine sources, so much so that I couldn't feel the presence of God; have lately been moved in a completely different manner. The beauty of nature in its springtime speaks to me of God and gives me confidence in Him, so many thoughts seem to come to me from above and touch me deeply. To speak truthfully, there are many considerations which touch pious souls but which leave me cold. However, I don't think that it is wrong to stop at what suits me, and among all the things that could touch my heart, there is none that has more force than the thought that it is possible that God wills to lead me this way, to listen to me, to inspire me, to approach me, as it were, and indeed, to unite Himself to me in a union ever more real." (Idem)

In union with the despoiling and the blind abandonment in which Your Holy Mother lived, in union also with that which You bore for me in Your passion, I offer You, my Divine Saviour, the total sacrifice of all my affections, and thoughts, not wanting to attach myself to any wisdom or any consolation but my Rule which I will accomplish thoroughly, no matter what state of desolation I might be in, or whatever pretext I might have for leaving a single point, be it contempt, or fatigue, or any interior or exterior suffering which might come." (157.12.8.40)

“I abandon myself today with immense hope, to all the means that You will send me, to receive the without fear, in simplicity and love. Here I am, the child of Your Providence; do whatever You want with me according to Your Mercy. You will do it, my God, but grant also, that having Providence for a Mother, I may respond to all its designs and embrace them with love...” (164- March 40)

“All that I have seen during this retreat, of abandonment, of simplicity, of a continual passivity in the Hands of God in order to do all for His glory by the sole movement of His Will; all this is still very obscure for me. It comes quickly in prayer, where, in fact, I don’t sense anything else; I see it as my mend, my aim, but I lack the means to enter into it. I don’t know how to hold myself there, how to live according to this simplicity. Thus, when I return to action, I can’t keep it for even a quarter of an hour.” (169. Feb.1841)

“I think it’s a fact, that now there is nothing that can prevent me from belonging to God – problems with work, superiors, politics, the interior life, nothing could deprive me of my religious being; so much so that, for me, to be is the same thing as to be a religious. It seems to me that to repeat the ‘Quis nos separabit a caritate Christi’ wasn’t pride, because I had confidence in the All-Powerful Spouse.” (170- March 41)

“May he grant me the assurance of always being His, even when He seems not to take care of me, but gives me fully to others; if He never has a doubt, a jealous fear, I owe Him, in turn, that confident belief that it is because He will always keep me His, and, trusting on His Goodness, fidelity, I may say peacefully: ‘Neither death...nor life... nor any creature can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus’. These thoughts pleased me, but I did not dare linger on them. They did not seem to come to me from God, but rather from my own mind. It would be too great a joy, besides.” (170 -March 40)

I abandon myself unconditionally to follow the slightest influence of Your Spirit. I accept to submit myself so much to the influence of the life of Jesus in me, that His sentiments will prevail over mine. I want to have in my heart only what was in His, in my mind only the judgments of His, in my body only what His suffered.” (170- 15.Aug.42)

“... but all that comes to me in my dryness, is the desire to surrender myself unconditionally in prayer, in action and in suffering, making myself conformable to Jesus Christ. The desire to despoil myself of all ability to resist it, and to entrust this total abandonment that I want to make of myself to the one who has care of my soul, by begging him not to spare me any point in the real practice of this life of disappropriation.

Therefore I abandon myself unconditionally to all that I know, by the light of Your grace, to be good and perfect. I renounce saying to myself that I don’t have to make certain sacrifices for I want to bind myself to do all that is most perfect, provided it is not against my vocation or obedience...”

“Once more I come to lay one of my resistances at Your feet. I abandon myself and hand myself over especially no penance; I accept all the means of practising it without any reserve or measure but that obedience. I renounce all my objections, strip myself of all my reasonings and even if it comes a matter of losing my life by penance, I consent to it, recognising that it is not for me to judge and no matter what it might cost me. Here I am, ready and abandoned without measure.” (Id.)

“I place myself in His hands without reserve, surrendering to whatever He wants to do in the most intimate depths of my being. Having renounced, by means of a new vow of obedience which I’ve renewed with all my heart, the least right of ownership of myself, I choose by this means to obey faithfully, by giving myself entirely to my relationship with Jesus Christ, by cutting off as much as I can of words, of sleep, of useless reflections, of distractions, of amusements and of self- preoccupations, in order to be engaged entirely in this relationship.” (199- 1845)

“...I must be sufficient for you...I want you often to be at My feet, dealing with Me with the freedom and confidence of a dear daughter and the love of a spouse, but also with the greatest humility and lowering possible; small, humble, supple, simple and repentant...” (207-1849)

“To keep myself united to His Will in all events, receiving all from His Hand with confidence. Never to mistrust the Heart of my God; to throw myself upon it with hope and love, believing that Jesus opens it to me and calls me there. To prepare myself and to become accustomed to bear privations, difficulties and contradictions with good grace, gently and pleasantly...” (230-1873)

“How I thank God for having been able to make this retreat. My soul which has been broken and trouble for some time, has refound Jesus in the meditation of the denial of St. Peter. I saw that despite of all his faults, during those three years together, Our Lord has always loved him. He reproved him, He forgave him, He kept confidence in him, He showed Himself transfigured before him, and before me, also, so many times in my life. Peter, to whom He had entrusted all, wasn’t able to keep watch even one hour with Him, then, while trying to follow Him, he denied Him. Jesus looks at him: with what a look of suffering and love! Peter has not followed either the way of suffering nor the Master to Calvary; he weeps, he has confidence, and after His Resurrection, Jesus comes to him. He entrusts His Church to him. How⁶ many things Jesus has entrusted to me! What duties are mine, if I look at them from the angle of the confidence in me that Our Lord has shown! And to think that He makes it possible for me to make myself worthy of such trust! Yes, I want to, and I can, have a confiding contrition now. Yes, entrusted with Jesus’ work and with His interests, I wish and I can, now, with this divine grace which lifts me up, work at renouncing myself, at defeating in myself the hypersensitivity, the stiffness and all which comes from my character. To do the work of Jesus, I need despoiling, detachment, mortification in the use of everything that is useful to nature- food- I need the word of God: to say nothing except what can do good, nothing but good things. The influence of Jesus: to console, to be good, to make Our Lord’s presence felt...

I come to what the Father told me, to take from the hands of Our Lord as a participation in His poverty, His humiliations and His suffering, the pain they can cause me, the words they can say of me or to me; my powerlessness to help my family; in short, everything that would be able to make me rebel. To do this, I need great grace and great light. I have asked for both.” (235-1885)

⁶ instead of « has » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 11, 1980

A WAY...OF THE CROSS

M. Hélène Marie

We have seen Jesus as Son, accepting and embracing the Father's will. And so we have come to the journey of Jerusalem, to the place where Jesus showed he was Son in a special way, the place of his Passover, death and Resurrection.

In the first part of my talk, I shall review, briefly, some of the scriptural and theological aspects of the Pascal Mystery. The second section will consist of a study of Marie Eugénie's approach to the Passion, her response to it, and what she taught about it.

1- THE PASCAL MYSTERY.

What was the situation of the Apostles on Easter morning? The death of Jesus meant the collapse of all their hopes. They were left with no tomorrow. Everything had been swept away, leaving only emptiness. After bringing them, through so many signs, a sense of nearness of God, at the last moment Jesus had been unable either to perform a sign or to obtain one from God to vindicate himself. It had all ended in weakness and derision⁷. Perhaps there was nothing but silence to follow? The disciples certainly felt there was nothing to expect. Maybe it is only through such a journey to the uttermost depths of disillusionment that we can develop a capacity to accept the things prepared for us? For them, everything turned on what was to take place on that "first day of the week".

Face to face with suffering and death, like the disciples, man is seized with fear. Faced with God's silence, we find ourselves questioning, our faith wavers. Can it be possible?

For it is as someone who suffers, who is torn apart, that God reveals himself. In Jesus, the eternal Word of God, the mystery of Sonship is revealed as suffering. At the heart of the Trinity, the love through which the three Persons are One, is an indissoluble mystery of eternal suffering and eternal joy. To us, these two things seem totally incompatible, because of our tendency to idealise our joys, and to associate our hurts with sin and death; in God, the two are at one. And so the cross is set at the heart of God's designs, and at the core of the world's history. It is the turning point of the ages, fixed from the beginning of time. It is the revelation of the everlasting mystery of God. It is God's work. According to popular belief, God is revealed in power, strength and glory. But here he shows himself as all that is thought as opposite of great, noble, attractive, respectable; he shows himself powerless, Lordship in slavery, Life done to death. What the world thinks of as strong and wise is thus reduced to absurdity. What is taken generally for insanity⁸, weakness, and scandal is here the power and wisdom of God incarnate. Love sustains and justifies the paradox without blurring it, because it is the property of love to reconcile what is different.

Let us stop and consider the Gospel of Luke for a little. It was when Jesus began to speak of the necessity of the Passion that the difficulties of the disciples started to come to the surface. Before then, it had been easy to follow Jesus. It had been a matter of performing works of mercy, offering services. It was now to lead them to the heart of the mystery of service, total availability to the will of the Father. It is at this point that the disciple starts

⁷ Instead of « futility » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸ Instead of « folly » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

learning to become a true witness of Christ. As Jesus began to prepare them for what was to come, we can observe that there was a kind of block. The disciples, docile till then, started to balk. After the second prediction of the Passion (Luke 9,44) Luke observes “But they did not understand him when he said this; it was hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about what he had just said.” (Lk 9, 45). In spite of the clarity of what Jesus said, they did not understand his Word about the Cross. There was an internal block an inability to accept his saying, an inability and refusal which was to become brutally apparent in the denial of Peter. As Luke relates the triple denial we look on while faith is tested and gives way. Towards the end of the public ministry, after the third prediction of the Passion, Luke writes: “But they could make nothing of this; what he said was quite obscure to them, they had no idea what it meant.” (Lk 18, 34) They had failed to understand: this is the same crisis of discipleship as we find in the two on the road to Emmaus, in spite of their verbal acquaintance with the Scripture, their book-knowledge of the basic themes of its teaching, they were unable to make sense of the death of Jesus.

And, faced with this mystery, we too sleep, like the disciples; or worse, indifferent to the drama, we yell or joke like the Jews or the Roman soldiers. If we are looking for unmistakable confirmation, or a certainty that fills us with ready-made confidence, we shall be denied our desire, like the women who were astonished to find that the corpse they were lovingly ready to embalm was no longer there, at their finger-tips. If we are in search of something to sweeten the bitterness of death or the unrelenting ordinariness of daily life, all that is reserved for us is disillusionment and fear. We would be glad of incontrovertible proof of the Resurrection, proof based on something other than faith. If we proclaim that Jesus is risen, at the same time, we admit our unbelief. But from this tension, the internal struggle which the mystery brings to light in the heart of all who let it touch them, men learn that life is hope. And they learn it in the context of ordinary everyday reality, as Jesus’s contemporaries learnt it. The message of the Resurrection is that the presence of God is at work at every level of human life, unmasking the forces of evil, diseases and neuroses, hardness of heart, violence, lack of understanding. Henceforward evil is defeated. God, in Jesus, crucified and drained of strength, is stronger than death; “death is swallowed up in victory.” The God who transcends all limitations, has, in Jesus, touched the extreme of self-annihilation and desolation to reach the extreme of glory and exaltation. Such, amid all our doubts, is our faith.

2- WHAT THE PASCAL MYSTERY MEANT TO MARIE EUGENIE AND HER TEACHING ABOUT IT.

In the simplest possible way, entirely through quotations from what she wrote during her life, taken in chronological order, we shall see Marie Eugénie’s attitude to the mystery of death and Resurrection, when suffering overtook her and struggling as best she might against the power of evil, with faith renewed, she pressed on towards Christ crucified. I am presenting them practically without commentary, so that each of you can reach her own interpretation, identify with or recognise this or that phase of self-analysis, of doubt or of faith, or perhaps discover the face of Christ himself reflected in hers.

I shall not go to consider her teaching on the subject in the chapters of 78 and 81, until afterwards.

As early as 1836, when she was 19, Marie Eugénie exclaimed: “Distressed, heartsick, weary of life, filled with an inexpressible sadness... because I know there is no-one with a

moment to spare to bring my heart back to life.” On the same page: “Real suffering does not complain, because it dare not even ask for a little heart’s happiness⁹.” (2.151-36)

The time for decision was approaching, and she would have to inform her family that she had chosen the religious life: “The Spirit buffets me like an eagle, sometimes all the energies of my soul are overpowered, even my body fails; I feel broken, emptied, quivering, trembling like a leaf.” (2.160-37)

But if the Lord is summoning her: ...”To leave you, all of you that I love, is a sacrifice like death itself but... can I hesitate when the Lord asks it of me?” (2.154-37)

Writing to the Abbé Combalot: “I want to accept our Lord’s cross in whatever form it comes to me. This intention will give me peace even in the midst of distress.” (I.L. 21-39) Again to the Abbé Combalot: “I often tell myself that from the standpoint of faith, I ought to derive Hope from what I am suffering... beyond the Cross there should be a sort of spiritual resurrection.” (I.L. 34-41)

From a conversation: “How many tears I shed during those first months of the foundation. It gave me an eye infection. I did not cry by day so that the sisters should not notice, it was the nights.” (Conv. p.2)

And it goes on: “I suffer in bits, in a chopped up kind of way everything brings a different trouble and uneasiness... I share in the faintness which enfeebled the Lord, and through excess of love drew him downward to all that is wretched, to the extreme of self-forgetfulness.” (2.181.-42)

“It seems to me that my dwelling is set up in despair.” (7.1551-42) “...I dare not let myself own to the reluctance and nausea which has replaced the love which used to be so vigorous and tender... If I could only fall into an everlasting sleep, into nothingness.” (7.1553-42) ; and again: “My soul often seems like a dissolving smoke.” (7.1557-42)

Two years later, after the move to the Impasse des Vignes, and just before the move to Chaillot: “...I speak in God’s name, and it is not God who speaks in me; I bear him in my clothes, in my authority, in all I seem to be, and I can only weep when, withdrawing into myself, I measure the gulf which separates us.” (2.196-4)

So as to die in Christ, Marie Eugénie wanted to be fully alive, she did not set out be her own executioner: “I felt a love of suffering I cannot account for... I could have shouted for joy, at seeing myself consumed by pain, a vengeful harsh joy, an unbounded hatred for myself. Go has no part in all this.” (2.184-42)

And here is a horrifying phrase: “My condition, a sort of nothingness¹⁰ of Christ.” (7.1582-43), frightening contrast to that later declaration of hers: “Everything comes from Christ, everything belongs to Christ, everything must be done for Christ.”

In fact, a little later, she was writing: “I am ready to submit so completely to Christ’s life in me that his attitudes always dominate my own.” (2.185-43)... “I do not think that there is anything exaggerated about offering oneself to Christ to be a kind of supplementary humanity, that is to respond to his will as his own humanity responded to the Word, letting

⁹ Instead of « ease » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰ Instead of « a sort of void empty of Christ » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Jesus act through us in all that we do.” (7.1586-43) And wisely, she remarks: “I would never chose suffering as a means of sanctification... Only God has the right to stretch me on a cross and I feel that I could accept it only at his hand.” (8.1618-44)

“My soul is so full of uneasiness that I dare not venture in.” (8.1696-45) This is a sentence from the correspondence with Fr d’Alzon which recurs with many variations: “My soul is still sad; my soul is sick: my usual feeling is that I would like to die.” (9.1807-47) In fact she was exposed to all kinds of trials: endless worries, illnesses, deaths, delicate health, political disturbances, restricted means, mental and spiritual distress: “As for my soul, I feel as though I were carried along by a running tide of discouragement and suffering, like a solitary boat on a rapid stream hurrying to destruction.” (8.1618-44) “At present my whole self is empty of God in a way that terrifies me.” (10.1938- 48)

And yet: “The sea of tenderness which I discover in Jesus’s words before and after his Passion melts my soul and touches it deeply.” (1.2027-48) “Now at last I would like to be united to the death of Jesus Christ.” (2.208-50) ...she was then 33.

During the business of the mission to the Cape: “How heavily that part of the Congregation weighs on my heart!” (II.2193-51) And there is this wonderful letter to Father d’Alzon:” He loved me, he chose me, I am on my way to him, and every flickering of my determination is a step to the final flicker when I shall be wholly absorbed in him.” (II.2224-52)

But the trials keep on recurring: “I am turning in a two-legged animal that can neither pray, nor have any spiritual thoughts of its own.” (II.2355-53) “I am full of failings, I am often unfaithful, but I do not want to be, I feel I belong to God through every fibre¹¹ of my being.” (II.2352-53) “I would like to be more completely motivated by love, or rather by a more tender love.” (12.2394.-54) “When I make the way of the Cross, I ask him, by all his sorrows, to establish his life in me.” (12.2444-54)

Here is another expressive phrase: “For some time, I have been continually asking God for a wound of his love, heartfelt and ardent, so that my whole heart may be full of him, straining towards him in everything and against every obstacle, however harsh¹².” (12.2459-55)

Here is her way of rediscovering God, when she was weighed down by difficulties with her health, the strict obedience demanded by Fr Picard, the continual scenes created by Sr Marie Augustine: “At the moment I am drawn myself at the foot of the Cross, and adore our Lord in his immeasurable suffering and humiliation. It is a lesson I badly need.” (13.2790-60) “I am more aware of the treasure that is mine in Christ suffering through me. It revives my trust and love.” (14.3124-67)

This is her way of referring to the resurrection: “I feel I am leaving the little streams behind, and going to¹³ the sea...and the thought of that sea fills my heart and elates me¹⁴.” (14.3136-67)

¹¹ Instead of « fiber »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹² Instead of « formidable” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³ Instead of "making for the sea” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁴ Instead of « intoxicates me » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

She was 50.

But distress returns: “For some time now I have felt I would like to die.” (14.3192-68) “It is in my soul that I am worn out and deeply troubled¹⁵.” (14.3228-69) In the course of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, Marie Eugénie painfully gave expression to a kind of agony, she doubted God, felt herself in revolt against him. She wrote: “When evening came I was still searching for you in vain, and I shrank from falling asleep in such a state of dread. Then, at your feet, I turned my eyes away from the bloodstained earth where I cannot find you, and looked only to you, Jesus crucified. I proclaimed your love through my cries and my tears, I sealed it with all my being through an act of Faith in which I concentrated my whole life, and, assuaged at last, I laid my hands in yours once more as before. I promise to preserve my peace, to keep my joy, in spite of the war, ‘because so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ and because ‘he is with us until the end of time.’”

During a retreat, Marie Eugénie wrote: “My longing to become holy fills my mind.” “Alone with God I begged him to crucify me, but only so as to give me himself.” “Oh Jesus, I wish to accept the sorrows which still await me, as a cross that I love, since you give it me to make me one with you.” (2.237-86) We know how painful the trials of the years from 80 to 86 were. She had written just before: “I have reached the point of accepting, at our Lord’s hands and as my share of his suffering, the hurts people inflict me, the state of my family, in short everything which could help me go higher.” (2.235-85)

Then there were further trials: the behaviour and financial ruin of her nephews, the illness of Mère Thérèse Emmanuel, strained relations between the two Assumption Congregations, etc... “O God, help me to contemplate your Passion by giving me an understanding of the mysteries of suffering, of humiliation, of the poverty that hurts, setting at the centre of these branches of your cross, your love, your heart, and your obedience. Teach me to love these things.” (2.256) “To accept crosses from our Lord’s hands in a spirit of love and in union with his sufferings, with a firm trust that such troubles will bring Jesus to us.” (2.236)

And here is something Mère Thérèse Emmanuel wrote to her: “I am proud to see you so full of our Lord, so united to him in what you have to bear. He is really leading you by the ways he went, attacked, accused, humiliated, forsaken...I can trace the outline of the Passion in what is happening to you.” (2.3.86- Inédits)

And a little later, just before her 70th birthday: “You will understand that I have been accepting the way I have been judged in union with all that our Lord had to undergo in his Passion...As I meditate on the Passion it seems to me that we must bear our crosses lovingly and for love; there is a kind of joy in this thought, and it sustains me.” (4.1097-86) “The purpose of all this is that Christ should live in us.” (General Chapter, 1886)

Finally, here is an undated prayer:

“O Jesus, give me the love which is most truly love,
the love of the Cross, not those grand heroic crosses
which lift us above our ordinary selves,
but the common inglorious crosses,
which, alas, we are so reluctant to bear,

¹⁵ Instead of « trouble » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

the everyday crosses life is so full of,
 the ones we stumble on in the middle of the road,
 forgetfulness, opposition, misjudgement, failure,
 physical illness, mental confusion, loss of heart.
 Only then will you know that I love you,
 even though I may not know it myself,
 and that is enough for me.”

Let us now take a quick look at Marie Eugénie’s teaching, as presented in the Chapters of 78, 79, and 81. This is simply a guide to further reading, a summary of the main points touched on.

Marie Eugénie offers us the Passion, as “one of the main concerns of the soul.” (81, p.22) We are to keep our Lord company in his extreme suffering” (81, p.87) to participate “lovingly” in the Passion, “through our Lord’s heart, through his own feelings.” (81, p.29) Often in the course of these chapters Marie Eugénie asks us to “come back to ourselves”, which means ‘meditate’ and this leads to a prayer of total submission of the Father’s will.” (81, p.28)

Marie Eugénie has a very clear theology of the Passion, declaring that Christ first loved men when the majority were wicked (79, p.320), that the purpose of the Passion is to glorify the Father (79, p.319-320) and to save mankind. (pp. 319-320)

It follows that “our Lord’s total generosity” (81, p.28) calls for generosity in reply. (79, p.315) “Generosity” is probably the most frequently occurring word in these chapters. On 25th March, 81, Marie Eugénie spoke of the Passion and Incarnation together under the heading: “The mystery of God’s great generosity to man.” (81, p.64) Noteworthy on the same subject is her fine commentary on the prayer of St Ignatius: “You have given me everything...” (79, p.313)

It is with this implication of generosity, of unstinting self-giving, that Marie Eugénie speaks, in connection with Christ’s sacrifice, of “a burning desire for sacrifice.” (79, p.312) It is not so much a matter of immolation as of consecrating everything to God through an offering without reservation, detachment, letting everything go, particularly whatever might be an obstacle to love of God. She instances one’s independence of action, fortune, friends, family “from a desire to be grounded in love...we sacrifice all other interests.” (79, p.312) “All those little interests which make up the baggage of the self.” (75.12.78) Here the word is “desire” it is no exercise in self-improvement, she is talking of passionate urge launching us on the quest for God.

Marie Eugénie shows her knowledge of life and her realism when she adds: “At first we do not understand how much our Lord is asking of us.” (79, p.312) Which shows that we may expect that there will be a progress in our self-giving before it becomes sacrifice. In 78 too, she was talking of the spirit of sacrifice: “That the world may know that I love the Father, come, let us go.” (Jn 14,31), that is to say, let us go forward to meet the time of sacrifice, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” (78, p.90) and immediately following: “And so sacrifice is the sign, the fruit and the characteristic of love.” (p.90)

Marie Eugénie talks of the “horror of sin” (81, p.23) as the greatest grace we can ask for.” (p. 26) She often asks us to pray for sinners, even if she sometimes makes it look like a commercial arrangement: “You will make a little bundle as it were, of all this (suffering,

mortification) so as to obtain the Salvation of one of those sinners, so that in the course of this week each of you may hope to bring a soul back to God.” (79, p.323)

There is another way to follow the Passion with Marie Eugénie –through the figures to whom she so often refers: Mary, the Virgin: “Look at Jesus with her, and through her eyes” (81, p.94); Judas (81, p.32.35); Mary Magdalen (81, pp.58-59); Peter, etc..

Finally, if you take the Chapters of 81 in order, they make up a Way of the Cross, or continuous meditation on the Passion. This makes them very valuable. In each meditation, Marie Eugénie suggests a grace to ask for, points to a gift we may hope to receive, in the tradition of St Ignatius (Ask for what I want to desire, here...) . When the subject is the agony at Gethsemane, one may ask for obedience, avoid the small faults that lead to bigger ones (81, pp.26,29). When meditating on Jesus forsaken by his friends, one asks for the strength of mind to forsake honours, high office, etc... (pp.39-42). When Jesus is dragged before the courts, ask for the grace of not passing judgment (p.43); when meditating on the Physical sufferings of Jesus, try to obtain loving compassion (pp.57-58); at the feet of Jesus on the Cross, ask for patience (p.75,79).

There is no conclusion to be drawn from this account.
The way is open before us. The way that Jesus took, the way of his Cross by which death is overcome.

July 12, 1980

RESURRECTION

M. Hélène Marie

We will start by seeing the Resurrection through the Word of God then we will look at it a second time through the eyes of Marie Eugénie.

I- THE RESURRECTION IN THE WORD OF GOD.

“Death is swallowed up in victory” St. Paul tells us. The Resurrection does not abolish

Death, but frees us from fear of death because it draws its sting – death has lost its venom: Christ has put Death to death. He is the death of Death, the death of all that weighs us down, of our sinfulness. In His final journey to the Father, to the upland pastures of the Resurrection, it is not just that He has come to life again; He is THE Living One: death has no more power over Him. He did not just get up so as to lie down again. He is the LIVING ONE.

What is hard for us, with our “little faith” is to believe that the Risen Christ is indeed the Crucified. Jesus shows the mark of the nails, the wound in His side; the Risen One is He Whom they saw die; the hand held out to us is marked with scars. He can make me stand erect, just as He did Peter. “Jesus put out His hand and held him. “ Man of little faith”, He said, “Why did you doubt?” (Mt. 14,31) His wounds are glorious, “It is by His wounds that we are healed.” (Is.)

The Passion and the Resurrection are not merely related to one another; they interpenetrate each other as inseparable aspects of the one mystery of salvation. Thus Luke takes care to present the whole long account of the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem in the context of the Ascension: “Now as the time drew near for Jesus to be taken up to Heaven, He resolutely took the road for Jerusalem.” (Luk.9,51) On the other hand, when he describes the glorified life of Christ, he reminds us deliberately and insistently of His Passion and Death: “The Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified.” (Luk.24,7) “Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory?” (Lk.24,26) “Look at My hands and My feet. Yes, it is I indeed.” (Luk. 24, 39.46) In the same way Paul never stops thinking of the Resurrection even when he speaks only of death. The life to which he so often alludes, is always conceived of as a participation in that of the Risen Christ. “I live now, not with my own life but the life of Christ Who lives in me.” (Gal. 2,20) and in many other places: Gal. 8,14; Rom. 8,2-5). Have you noticed that the Gospel attributed to Mark, which is certainly a Gospel of the Resurrection, ends with the empty tomb and the fear of the women? Mark’s last word is this: “ The women came out and ran away from the tomb, because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to a soul for they were afraid.” (Mk.16,8) Finally, in the gospel of John the mystery is so profoundly one that terms which, in the early catechesis, were used of the Resurrection of Jesus are used to refer both to the Passion and the Glorification of Christ: “ Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (Jn 12,23) “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.” (Jn. 12,32.34) In the very heart of the account of the Passion, John presents Jesus as victorious. It is He, Jesus, Who delivers Himself up to the cohort: “When Jesus said, ‘I am He’, the guards moved back and fell to the ground”.(Jn. 18,6) “It is you who say it”, answered Jesus, “Yes, I am a King.” (Jn 18, 37) Finally, the Lamb of the Book of Revelations

appears to the Seer of Patmos, “Standing” because of His Resurrection, and yet at the same time he “seemed to have been sacrificed...” the immolation is inseparable from the glory.

But for us this is precisely the difficulty. We would like our awareness of the Resurrection to be less physically immediate, less intellectually challenging, less emotionally demanding, less disturbing to our whole selves. But what would such a human experience amount to, made to our measure, a mere reflection of our capacity to feel, to think and love?

Because it fills us beyond our own capacities, the presence of God is given us in the midst of frustrations, the death of what we had expected: “He is not here!” (Mk.16,6). The Risen One only reveals Himself to us as He stirs our painful memories, memories of our denials (Mk.14, 72) and of our desertions (Mk. 14,50). It is there that we must see Him, and not in the “here” of our desires.

Such is the experience of the Resurrection: frustrating to anyone who starts from human dreams, from some particular idea of the Messiah he has adopted or even from an image that he has made for himself to stand for God. We have to go down into the very heart of that frustration, allow fear and dread to take possession of us, forcing us to silence for a time. In this silence of our being we suddenly discover the emptiness of our existence and the terrifying absence of God, and so we come to the prayer of Jesus: “Father, everything is possible for You.” (Mk. 14,36) I am no longer constructing my Christ or my God out of my own desires, as did Peter on the road to Caesarea (Mk. 8,29-33): now, it is God Who reveals Himself to me as He did to the Centurion on Golgotha (Mk. 15,39). Our daily life, that of Galilee, now takes on its full meaning. We are faced by the question whose immensity is that of the Opened Heart of God: “You, who do you say I am?” And it suddenly awakens an echo in our heart, shaking us and putting us at the mercy of God:” But you, who do you say I am?”

Such is the Good News of Jesus, Messiah and Son of God, Risen for us.

II- THE RESURRECTION IN THE WRITINGS OF MARIE EUGENIE.

I am only suggesting a few lines of approach for you to follow up for yourselves.

Marie Eugénie dwells on some of the theological and Scriptural points which we have already

Considered above: “May Our Lord form these characteristics in you. They belong properly to the Passion, but they are not annihilated by the Resurrection; because Our Lord is never divided from Himself.” (78, p.97) the Church shows us the Paschal Lamb, immolated, risen, glorious, supreme Lord of the earth.” (81, p.103)- Our Lord rises, never more to die.” (79, p.327)

Marie Eugénie invites us to plunge ourselves in this mystery: “Live by the Divine Life, Our Lord brings you in His Resurrection”, and she herself quotes Col. 3,1-2: “Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in Heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand. Let your thoughts be on Heavenly things, not on the things that are on earth.” It really seems that here, we have the Scriptural text best expresses the mystery by which we live in the Assumption. “Take on the Spirit of the Resurrection, a more courageous, a stronger spirit, which rises above difficulties and sufferings.” (79, p.340) It is the “type of the religious life on earth” (77, p.231). For us, the Resurrection is “passing from one life to another...as it was for the Apostles.” (79, p.325)

- This mystery brings us a “sober joy” (79, p.324), a “deep joy which transforms us – which is Adoration...which is our renewal of ourselves in the joy of our vocation” (79, p.329). We are, even, to “wish Our Lord the joy of Easter, so that He may find it in us.” (79, p. 330). – Our life must always tinged with joy, even in sacrifice.” (Easter, 78, p. 88)
- But the Resurrection also invites us to a struggle: “We rise with Jesus Christ...each of us knows where her own field of battle and triumph lies” (79, p. 326). Every single thought, faculty and feeling is to be renewed. (79, p.330)
- “On Easter Day, is it fitting to talk of self-sacrifice? Yes, because this virtue is an every-day one, in the Christian and in the religious life...the virtue best suited to the daughters of the Assumption is the one that is proposed to us on the Feast of the Resurrection” (78, p.90). And so, there is a spirit of self-denial, a spirit of sacrifice proper to the Resurrection and which is especially suited to our spirit. Marie Eugénie explains it in the following lines, still referring to Col. 3: “In order to live by this higher life, we must renounce the earthly life.” (78, p. 90) “We rise higher” (p. 93)
- It seems that the “spirit” she speaks of is what we call “joyful detachment”. In the chapter which follows, Easter, ‘78, she notes: “Instead of bewailing what we recognise as the will of God, we make the best of it, with a certain joyful detachment from any merely human or earthly point of view... Let us not complain unendingly about our crosses. “(78, p.125) To moan, to give way to lassitude, to be disconcerted, to reproach God, aren’t these real sins? It is as if we were trying to escape from the human condition, trailing life like a burden we are unwilling to shoulder. The Resurrection, as Marie Eugénie presents it to us, invites us to take up our cross, that is, our life, like a banner.
- In the two chapters of 79, Marie Eugénie goes on from the teaching on the Resurrection to the joy of being able to meet the glorified Christ in the Eucharist. (79, p.327-328)
- Finally, it is up to you to work on the delightful chapter of April 20, ’79, entitled: “On meditating the Gospels of the Resurrection.” Following St. Ignatius, Marie Eugénie invites us to imagine the scene, to take up our position near the tomb, to watch. And then, each actor in the drama files past before us: Peter, the Apostles, John, the women, the disciples of Emmaus and of course, Mary Magdalen, because “Jesus always comes in the end, if we look for Him.” (333-334). In this chapter, Marie Eugénie tells us something of what she herself sees: “the eagerness with which each of these holy men and women searches for Jesus and has eyes for Him alone.” (p.333) – They run towards Him with an ardent faith. Faith! It seemed to have been extinguished. And yet, though hidden like a spark in the depths of the apostles’ hearts, it must have been great indeed since they could not pay attention even to the angels...they sought only the Lord.” (p. 333)

I leave the last word to Marie Eugénie: “The mystery of the Resurrection is in harmony with our spirit...The Assumption is a kind of Resurrection.” (78, p. 88)

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(Chapters of M.M.E)

(cf. "Resurrection")

EASTER SUNDAY

(13th April 1879)

Very dear daughters,

You have just sung:" this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad."

However, I don't know if you feel the way I do, but every year I feel that the joy of Easter is first of all a serious and profound joy, a joy of eternity. For the Apostles and the disciples, for all the early Church, who had seen Our Lord pass through such suffering and anguish, the day of Resurrection was without doubt a day of joy, but a joy which like all passages from great suffering to great joy, must have had something of seriousness and solemnity. Moreover, what strikes me in the Office is that as the days proceed the Church becomes more joyful, it regains its pace, it multiplies the Alleluias; but on the first day the "Victimae Paschali" is, in its beauty, still serious and solemn.

It is therefore a great day, this day of Easter, a day when one must try to live in oneself the passage from one life to another. (You know well the meaning of the word Passover-Pâques). See how the Apostles were transformed! How from the weak creatures that they were before the Resurrection, they became strong, full of faith, ardent! How they began to soak in the spirit of Apostolate which would be confirmed in them in the Holy Spirit. And for us who have already received the Holy Spirit, the feast of Easter could produce all these effects of transformation and passage.

If we look around outside ourselves, at what is happening in the Church, we see what great transformations are made in souls on the feast of Easter! For Christians, it is the time of great reconciliations, great acts of forgiveness, great transformations of life. If they have a guilty conscience about something, they prepare themselves all during Lent to go to Communion on Easter Sunday, they go to Confession, they give up the bad habit, they renounce it. If they have evil inclinations they leave them to be risen with Christ. This is how Easter is celebrated by the great sinners, when they have faith. They might have an enemy, some hatred in their heart; and during the year, perhaps several years, they haven't been able to overcome it. Finally, they come to a particular Easter in their lives, and they are transformed.

For us, it's not, at least I hope not, from a state of mortal sin that we have to rise, for how could anyone approach Our Lord so often and yet live with inclinations leading to mortal sin? But haven't we all certain little attachments, little habits, certain inclinations leading to venial sin? And so today is the day to go higher, to make greater sacrifices for God, to leave behind the life that is merely that of nature.

We still carry about in us the "old man". Even St. Paul complained about it, so anyone who doesn't feel it must be awfully proud. Let this Easter be a separation from the natural life and victory over the "old man"! Each one knows her place of struggle and triumph; where are her weaknesses, her imperfections, her attachment, her occasions of venial sin: let her make an effort there, a resurrection.

“Our Lord is risen, no more to die”. He enters into our hearts: it is He whom we have received this morning, risen and glorious; we bear Eternal Life. It is Eternal Life which has come to life in our flesh which is glorious forevermore and now bears the mark of divinity. But today’s feast reminds us especially of triumph and manifestation. It is this same glorious and radiant flesh which has been our food this morning; so let there not be any corner of our being that is not entirely illuminated.

It is the sun of truth, of justice, that you have received in your heart; try to let Him enter completely, to let Him penetrate all, so that He won’t leave any hidden faults which could develop into bigger failures; try to let Him reign over all, to illumine all, to transform all; let Him lead you in the ways of Eternity. It is as if, this morning, when Our Lord came to you, each one was transported to the throne of the Lam who was her food, He who, in His Glory and Splendour – such that the eye of man cannot see- is sitting on the Cherubim. For an instant we have approached Him by this Divinised Flesh, and each one has been able to render Him an adoration suitable to His majesty and a Thanksgiving which can satisfy Him completely.

You have been able to cover your life entirely with His precious Blood, the Divine Blood which enters into man to penetrate and enlighten him to the depths of his heart. St. Vincent de Paul, whom I so often quote, said: “He is in our feet, in our hands, in our hearts, in our minds. And what is He doing there? He renews all, He inflames all, He purifies all.” So it is, that in a moment, all our faults and ugliness are covered with this precious blood and we become pleasing to God.

You have been able to prostrate before the throne, to ask with His power for His favour. And what have you asked for? You have asked above all for His love, not only for yourself and your sisters, but for the Church, for our Holy Father the Pope, for the heads of Government, for Bishops and Priests, for your superiors.

Then having prayed for one another and for the faithful, pray for those outside the Church, who are also present before God, that there may be one Flock and one pastor.¹⁶ And ask Him also that in the Mystical Body which is His Church, we would be what the heart is in a body, the most vitally alive, the purest, the furthest from what is imperfect so as to have our dwelling in the very Heart of Jesus Christ.

May we find here the joy of Easter, a profound joy which transforms us, a joy which consists in adoring Jesus Christ in Glory, in Power, in the Majesty of His Triumph over all the nations of the earth, and His triumph in us; a joy which renews us in the joy of our vocation.

I haven’t spoken of another prayer which should also be in your heart. There are some Saints who thought that on Good Friday and Easter Sunday Purgatory is almost completely emptied. We must contribute to this and obtain for these souls also the joy of Easter. Ask that the grace of the visit of Our Lord to Limbo be extended all the way to this Kingdom without light, full of suffering, but also full of hope.

¹⁶ The literal translation of Marie Eugénie’s text in this Chapter is: “Then, after praying for each other, for the immense troop of the faithful of the whole world, you will also pray for the infidels, the heretics, the schismatic who, in this day, must be presented to God, to ask him that there be only one flock and one shepherd. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Finally, you know that the newly baptised are dressed in white for Easter and throughout the Octave; and you, Religious of the Assumption, you are almost entirely dressed in white for the Solemn Feasts. Let this be not only in appearance, but in reality, and may the Purity of Easter dwell in you and continue to grow until the moment when, following the Lamb wherever He goes, you follow Him robed in the white garments washed in His blood and purified of all stain.

(Chapters of M.M.E)

(cf. "Resurrection")

MEDITATING THE GOSPELS OF THE RESURRECTION

(20th April 1879)

My dear daughters,

Today I only want to say a few things about the Gospels of the Resurrection. I will give you a few counsels on how to easily meditate on them in a way that will help to draw out a few points which seem important to me. I would advise all those who meditate on these Gospels to transport themselves in their imagination to where the scene took place, to picture the persons who were present, and to place themselves on their knees as if they were there.

The first of these Gospels is the one where we are told of the visit of the holy women to the tomb. They find the stone rolled away. Our Lord's body is no longer there, but in its place are two angels who answer their questions. Remain on your knees before the sepulchre; look, contemplate, adore and love; love above all.

I find that the trait which is most revealed in the Gospels of the Resurrection is the ardour with which each of the persons concerned went directly to Jesus Christ alone with a total disregard for men or angels, for Our Lord was absolutely all that they were seeking. They sought after Him with an ardent faith. The Faith! It seemed to have been extinguished. And yet, although still hidden like a spark in the depths of the hearts of the Apostles, it must have been quite large since they couldn't pay much attention to the Angels, even though "the vision of Angels", says St. Gregory, "rejoices the human soul." But they were seeking only the Lord.

Take Mary Magdalen and the holy women. They find the sepulchre empty, they see the angels; but this doesn't satisfy them, they are only interested in Our Lord. Mary Magdalen remains behind in tears and thus Our Lord comes to console her. Remember that if a soul seeks nothing but Jesus Christ, if she sets out to find Him in all things, and if, no matter what happens to her, she is always ardent in her search for Jesus Christ, in the end, at one moment or another, He comes. "Your tears have touched me", says the Imitation, "your sighs, the desires of your heart."

The trial had been terrible. Think back to the darkness of Calvary, the anguish of the crucifixion, taking the body down from the Cross, the tomb. Imagine these poor women, coming with perfumed oils to embalm the dead body of one they loved! The divinity remained united with this body, but He had truly died. And see how throughout the trial they sought Him with so much ardour, fidelity and love.

Now let's look at the Gospel of St. Peter. If we truly stay there on our knees before the tomb we will see the Apostles coming at a run. When the news was announced to them, they ran, but he who loved the most was the quickest. St. John, who was younger, arrived first, but he didn't dare enter the sepulchre. Peter went in: he represents the power of the Church, the King of the Heavenly City after Our Lord; it is he who was given the keys and who opens the door for us. Although old, he runs with so much love and he goes into the sepulchre, with so

much power, because it is he who must open and proclaim to all men the mysteries of the death and life of Our Lord; he who, having been confirmed, must confirm his brothers.

It is the moment to ask him to come and confirm us in the Faith. We have faith, but we can always be confirmed in a greater Faith, in a greater Apostolic spirit and in a love of Jesus Christ which is even stronger. All these graces are in the hands of St. Peter. Think of him often and pray to him.

Let us kneel now by the lake of Genesareth at the moment of the miraculous catch of fish. Our Lord asks the disciples: “Children, haven’t you anything to eat?” And they reply:” We have been working all night and have caught nothing.” Notice what a laborious life the Apostles led, how poor they were. Then Our Lord said: “ Cast the net to the right.” They did and made the miraculous catch, a figure of what St. Peter would be doing later, he who was called “Fisher of men.” St. John said to Peter: “It is the Lord.” Notice that John recognised His Master right away by means of certain lights that belong to the Contemplative State. St. Peter in his ardour and strength didn’t even put on his tunic but ¹⁷dove into the water to go and throw himself at the Lord’s feet.

There is a mystery here. St. Jeanne ¹⁸de Chantal said somewhere: “There are people who are always turning around themselves and spending their time making sure that their appearance is what it should be, before going to the Spouse.” There are those in the Religious Life¹⁹ who spend their time checking if they are advancing, if they are saints, at what degree they have arrived; they are always looking at themselves and the beauty they think they have acquired; but the one who truly loves always goes straight to Our Lord like St. Peter, who,²⁰ stripped of even his only tunic –“erat enim nudus”²¹ - and without thinking about how he would look before our Lord²², hurried to Him with all ardour.

Venerate what is in the heart of St. Peter, a profound contrition and humility which is the foundation of love. Peter had always loved Our Lord, but his feeling of contrition made his love more tender and earnest. What a consolation it is for those who reproach themselves for faults of the past and have feared to go to Him, to find that the more Peter felt miserable, the more he was pardoned and then the more he threw himself with an ardour that couldn’t be stopped, to embrace the feet of Our Lord before all the others.

Try to meditate the Gospel in this way, keeping yourself on your knees before the scene, watching, contemplating, adoring. It doesn’t have to be only Our Lord whom you see, although it is towards Him that the attention of the soul is fixed, but look also at the models who are between you and Him. Mary Magdalen is one model, St. John another. St. Peter, the disciples of Emmaus, and all the others, are models for you in the various states of your soul. You can learn from them how to have a great fervour, a great fidelity and a great desire to receive the Holy Spirit. This is something else that is very striking: it wouldn’t be until

¹⁷ Mistranslation : there should be « he only took his tunic and dove ...» (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁸ Instead of « Jane » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁹ The text in French doesn’t use capital letters:” the religious life”. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁰ Forgotten text : « who, **on the words of Saint John** » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²¹ Mistranslation : « St Peter who, on the words of Saint John, **put on his tunic** – “erat enim nudus”- (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²² Mistranslation : « without thinking that he appears before our Lord in an inappropriate manner” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Pentecost that the Apostles would receive the fullness of the Spirit, but in the Gospels of the Resurrection we see that Our Lord was already saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit, he whose sins you forgive are forgiven... As My Father has sent Me, so do I send you.”

I would like to draw from this one other conclusion. We received the Holy Spirit when we were confirmed; but we still need other outpourings of the Spirit! How much more so in order to have an Apostolic spirit and to walk forward in life along the path Our Lord walked, in the midst of contradictions, of persecutions, of all the difficult and painful circumstances that marked the life of Our Lord: in order to imitate Him, poor, humiliated, discredited, insulted, unrecognised by His own and giving Himself to constant work, for it is truly such a life that Our Lord lived.

We must receive the Holy Spirit and have it at heart to live as Our Lord lived; that is to say, that rather than dreaming of a state where we would have peace, joy, happiness and the absence of contradictions and difficulties, we would expect to find in this life poverty, contempt, contradictions, difficulties and suffering, all of which were the companions of Our Lord in this world. We need a great outpouring of the Spirit in order first to understand this, and then the will that desires it, and finally, the strength to be faithful.

There are many more things I could say on this subject. I have only indicated a few, but if you look at the mysteries of the Resurrection and consider what each of the Apostles did, I believe you will find a great deal for practice and you will thus enter a bit further into the Risen Life.²³

The masters of the Spiritual Life²⁴ say that the most perfect state of Our Lord’s life is the Risen Life²⁵. To tend towards this state, which is the highest, is the most difficult but since a little of every state of Our Lord’s life must be reproduced in our souls,²⁶ - there must be something of the Risen Life as well since we always²⁷ are tending towards the resurrection. When we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts, it is His resurrected Humanity which is communicated to our flesh, it is His glorious Humanity which is placed on our lips in order to enter into us.²⁸

Let us enter into this spirit of Resurrection: a spirit ever more courageous and strong, a spirit which goes beyond difficulties, not by rejecting them, but rather by recognising in them the price of eternity. To the spirit of the world, contradictions, suffering and difficulties seem to be an obstacle, but to the spirit of eternity, they are ways to perfection; they are the chisel and hammer by which the portrait of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who must be formed in us, is printed and engraved in our heart.

²³ The text in French doesn’t use capital letters: “the risen life”. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁴ The text in French doesn’t use capital letters: “the spiritual life” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁵ The text in French doesn’t use capital letters: “the risen life”. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁶ Forgotten text : “much more, it is true, states of Jesus' earthly life, because we are still on earth; but also a little of the risen life, since we are tending towards the resurrection.” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁷ « always » has been added. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

²⁸ Does the literal translation have the same meaning? “It is a risen flesh that is communicated to our flesh, it is a glorious flesh that is placed on our lips to enter into the interior of our body”? (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 12, 1980

L'EUCCHARISTIE

P. Vingt-Trois

CONFERENCE NON TRADUITE (ELLE NE PORTE PAS SUR MARIE-EUGENIE) Dans le texte Français, pages 147 à 151 (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 13, 1980

“... and consecrate myself in accordance with the spirit of the Institute, to spread by my whole life, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Fourth vow.

“Before everything, Jesus Christ, the King of Eternity...the extension of His Kingdom...”

M.M.E.- Chap.2.5.84

“Our apostolic activity is situated in the very heart of our life, hidden in God. The more we allow Christ to live in us and we experience the things of God, the more we want to work for the extension of His Kingdom...” (Rule of Life, 69)

THE KINGDOM

S. Clare Teresa

I- INTRODUCTION.

“May your Kingdom come!” Desire for the coming of God’s Kingdom, work in order that the Kingdom be inaugurated on earth, is a constant factor in the life and spirituality of M. Marie Eugénie as well as a fundamental element in the charism of the Assumption. One finds this passion for the Kingdom of God from the moment of Marie Eugénie’s conversion until her old age.

We will not find a developed theology of the Kingdom in Marie Eugénie’s writings: she has several key ideas to which she returns all the time; you will see. With these few theological elements, she was able to draw up a plan of action. Her thought is precise and clear when it concerns the spreading of the Kingdom as our mission. It is a pivot of our unity of life at the Assumption.

In the chapters on the Spirit of the Assumption which you have on hand, there is no chapter on the Kingdom. M. Marie Eugénie seldom discusses it; however she speaks everywhere of what we must live ourselves, of our manner of forming ourselves – in view of the Kingdom. One could say that²⁹ M. Marie Eugénie is first and foremost concerned with our adoration of the King and of our total gift of ourselves.

p. 22 “to seek nothing but His empire.”

p. 73 “that we let our Lord establish Himself there, rule there as the master...”

²⁹ Instead of « the » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

From page 86 on, in the chapters on the perfect of Jesus Christ, we read for the first time that “Adveniat regnum tuum” is one of our mottos. (In this passage adoration, the perfect service, introduces us into the celestial city, or to say it otherwise: the Kingdom of Heaven).

TOUTES LES AUTRES REFERENCES DE LA PAGE 154-155 (CAHIER FRANÇAIS) NE SONT PAS TRADUITES, ON SAUTE DIRECTEMENT A LA PAGE 156. CA CORRESPOND AUX PAGES 131-132 DU DOCUMENT ANGLAIS.

(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

For today’ study, I propose that we take a text which treats only of the Kingdom, and which expresses M.Marie Eugénie’s mature thought on the subject. It is a chapter from the 3rd December 1882.

Let’s read the text. What do we find?

II- ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM: a word so dear to the Assumption.

I-

- That the social Kingdom of God come in the world.
- This ruling is belittled: God is rejected in the laws, the institutions.
- This ruling consists in the respect for God’s Name, adoration, the triumph of the Gospel in the world, institutions.
- It is the rule of faith
- It brought about by means of the Church.
- We must beg for the coming of the Kingdom without getting discouraged, (in spite of events and appearances to the contrary)
- We must implore the salvation in Jesus Christ.

II-

- The Lord must rule in us. That is what constitutes the Religious life!
- His rule in us is not yet complete; we must work towards it.
- It must be He who is manifested in us.
- In that way, Christ will live and rule in us.

III-

- Our apostolic ardour. The Kingdom is the goal of our apostolate, our works.
- Transform the society by the penetration of family life by the Gospel. It is God’ work, in Jesus Christ.
- But we have a part to play (work with zeal)
- Pray: that the yearning, the faith penetrate our action.

ADVENT

Pray during this season for the Coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ

(Chapter of 3 December 1882)

We are beginning Advent and the liturgy is full of prayers and desires for the coming of the Messiah. Is this time just a commemoration, a celebration of the long wait of four thousand years during which the patriarchs and prophets longed for the coming of the One who would bring the perfect law, a law of love? It is that, but it is also more than that. When the Church places on our lips words of longing for Jesus Christ, it is not just to remind us of the desires of our forefathers in ancient times, but especially to arouse our own longing for the coming of Jesus Christ in us.

You know the text which is so precious to the Assumption, the prayer of the Our Father that we repeat every day: “Your Kingdom come!” It is during this season that we should pray God that His Kingdom come for the reign of Our Lord is not total in any of the three domains of which I would like to speak:

I take first of all the SOCIAL REIGN. Never before perhaps has the reign of God been as unrecognised as today. But, despite all, it is certainly not the moment to be discouraged. Consider the lives of the saints: despite the difficulties of their times they were never discouraged. They never gave up praying for the coming of the Kingdom of God, that His Name be honoured, that He be adored, that the Gospel triumph in the world. Every day we say in the Office: “Let us bow down in worship before the Lord, because He is our God.” This invitation is not just for us: we do not place ourselves alone at Our Lord’s feet, but the whole Church comes before Him and all creatures.

We must never stop asking that the universal social reign of the Lord come – no matter how bad the situation may be...³⁰ During the persecutions of the first centuries of our era the Church was bathed in blood. But the martyrs prayed for and hoped for the conversion of the world and the triumph of the Church.³¹

We should never tire of praying for the Kingdom; even in a time like ours, when the insolence of the negation of God rises against Him and seems to say: “You do not exist, I do not recognise you, I shall put myself in your place.” We seem to hear anew words that the Holy Spirit place on the lips of David: “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.” (Ps 13,1) It is not only in their heart that men say it, the impious say it aloud in their laws, their institutions. But they will pass, these men of pride and negation, and as Our Lord says in the Gospel: “The heavens and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass.” (Matt.24,35)

It is fitting, then, that the faithful beg God to establish His Kingdom in this world even though it does not seem to want Him. It is fitting to pray with ardent desire and to say to the Lord: “Come with your gentleness which converts, with your power which subdues. Come with the charm of your Wisdom and your Beauty. Come with the splendour of your doctrine and your

³⁰ In the French text, this phrase is part of the precedent paragraph. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

³¹ **Before “During the persecutions,” a paragraph concerning England has not been translated. “ Lorsque l’Angleterre... et c’est l’effet de la prière.” (Page 157 in the French document).** (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Truth. Come, enlighten the world, come and save us.” These days we shall repeat often in the liturgy: “Come, Lord Jesus, and save us.”

From another point of view we, who are his servants and who make an open profession of recognising Him as our sole Master, should pray for the coming of Our Lord. We should pray for His Reign in ourselves. Certainly, He already reigns in us, and we all say with all our heart that He is our sole Lord and our King. But is His reign total in us? Who does not feel that in herself there is something more to add to the Reign of Our Lord? We have to ask Him, then, to become ever more in us, the Master, the Saviour, the Spouse. Whatever we do should manifest Him. In our teaching³², our administration, our influence, in all that comes from us, it should be the Lord that shines forth. None of our abilities or talents should escape from Him. We should pray that the word of John the Baptist is realised in us: “He must increase and I must decrease.” (Jn 3, 30) He is the one who should be seen in us, everywhere and always.

This is the essence of the religious life: to make the life of Jesus Christ increase and grow in us. When we can say of a religious that, in her seeing her, we see... Jesus Christ in her who lives, reigns, acts, works, serves... we are edified. We should tend towards this ideal, and, since this is not always what we find in ourselves, we should ask with ardent longing that Our Lord reign totally in us and that His coming be renewed in us.

There is another social coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ to which we are directly committed. We are engaged in various works of zeal. We work with youth. Is our main concern that they pass their examinations, that they know more or less history and geography? No, our concern is that the reign of Our Lord be formed in them, that His Kingdom come in them, and that, by education, we form a Christian family, the marvel of a family in which the Christian spirit reigns in such a way that from birth the children are filled with all that should make them true Christians.

If, through education, we form Christian girls first, then Christian women and families, shall we not have contributed to the social reign of Jesus Christ? Young people are the roots, as it were, from which will spring Christian families, and from these families will come others. And, if a new generation comes forth from our teaching, we shall have worked truly for the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ in society.

For this we must also pray, for we are certainly too little to perform the works of God... When we pray with faith and hope for the Church, for the coming of the Kingdom, we are praying for goods that we do not touch directly. We have contact though through Jesus Christ. He acts directly and touches all things. But, when we pray for our own sanctification, for our communities, that Jesus Christ reign there totally; when we pray for our students that they bring the purity of the faith to their families, that they bring them the energetic principles of Christianity, then we are praying for something that we touch. We can work with great ardour and the results will be reflected in ourselves also.

This Advent let us put great fervour into our desires, our faith, our prayer. This ardour will penetrate our action and in the degree that we shall have desired the coming of the Kingdom, our action will bear fruit. The people who come in contact with us should feel the presence of

³² « In our teaching » instead of « Our teaching »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

a creature that God has taken hold of and made His own, and in whom He has established His Reign so entirely that He can manifest Himself through her.

***LES TEXTES SUPPLÉMENTAIRES CONCERNANT LE ROYAUME PAGE 159
NE SONT PAS TRADUITS.***

III- HOW DID MOTHER MARIE EUGENIE COME TO THIS SYNTHESIS ?

Father Lacordaire to whom Mother Marie Eugénie wrote concerning her conversion: “You have replied to all my questions.”

Abbé Combalot who had chosen her as foundress of “his” congregation.

Father d’Alzon, spiritual director, collaborator and friend. They were all former disciples of Lamennais, although firmly attached to the Church.

From them, M. Marie Eugénie received ideas, a formation, books, enthusiasm! By them, she was introduced into a net-work of friends and acquaintances who shared a common love for the Church, a common desire for its renewal... and ideas which were inspired principally by Lamennais³³, Montalembert, Ozanam, Dom Gueranger figured among them...

What are the fundamental³⁴ ideas of this prophet who was unable to live as the prophets and accept their lot? I will cite those which you will recognise in the thought of our foundress.

Lamennais wanted to bring the truth of the faith out from behind the walls of a “private” Ghetto, so that it could penetrate the sciences, the social institutions, politics even.

“Transport the Kingdom of God to earth”, he preached, “that the prayer ‘Adveniat Regnum tuum’ may be answered.”

Seeing the forces of revolution and inevitable evolution like so many contemporary Christians in Latin America and elsewhere in similar situations of injustice and poverty, Lamennais³⁵ feared that the future would develop without or in spite of the Church, without the law of the Gospel.

But for him, the liberation of the world is rooted in Christianity, and he could not conceive of a new social order in which there would be freedom without God, or God without freedom! The Church must be present, an active agent for liberation and liberty at this turning point of History. The Church as an institution must be instrument which hastens the coming of the Kingdom.

In order to assume this great and noble task, according to Lamennais³⁶, it was necessary that the Church reform herself, that she join the cause of democracy and liberalism, that she transform herself in order to transform society. (Furthermore, she should favour and help all the contemporary revolutionary movements!) He elaborated a whole program for renewal – which we recognise in Abbé Combalot’s Introduction to the Constitutions – renewal of the Liturgy, scriptural studies, broadening of pastoral methods.

³³ Instead of “Lammenais” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

³⁴ Instead of « fundamental » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

³⁵ Instead of “Lammenais” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

³⁶ Instead of “Lammenais” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

To the individual christian, Lamennais lanced an appeal to holiness: “reform yourself in order to reform the world”, “be transformed in order to transform the world.”

A magnificent program by which the Kingdom of God would be established on earth, by man’s temporal means.

The seed fell on fertile soil. As we have already noted (cf. La Foi de M.M.E.), Marie Eugénie’s background had prepared her for her meeting with the perception of the world and the militant faith of Lamennais and his friends.

According to Marie Eugénie, “Christ had no place in her education”. But in fact, her education was rooted in the great tradition of European culture. The values of kindness, brotherhood, justice, the sense of duty, loyalty to one’s country were nothing other than the fruits of Christianity.

Certain anecdotes which have come down to us concerning her mother show that Mrs. Milleret lived out- and made living- these virtues. In addition, some men, family friends frequented the house; Marie Eugénie admitted that the conversations she heard at that time awoke a certain passion for politics – in the broad sense of the word (1) – and for what she called the “social mission”. (2) It would have been impossible for her to limit her horizons to the confines of her personal or family interests. She had become a citizen of the world.

In addition, passionate, absolute and generous by temperament, Marie Eugénie needed something, something great, to mobilize her. Lamennais’ doctrine offered her both a vision and a program of action capable of uniting her purely religious questions and preoccupations as well as her social and intellectual concerns – her passion for God and man.

For our era, she wrote, one needs “ a passion, a philosophy, a solid character “ (5 August 44). Using her own experience and these first inspirations of Lamennais (received through Father Combalot) as her point of departure, Marie Eugénie will make an original synthesis concerning the Kingdom, in accordance with her personal intuition and spirit. With discernment and critical sense she will draw the elements of her philosophy from lay-people and priests, saints and sinners, contemporary thinkers and from the long christian tradition.(3)³⁷ She will cultivate her passion for Truth and Love, and form herself for her mission as foundress of a religious order in the Church.

Her notes and letters, the reading we can make of the events in her life and of her interior experience permit us to trace the evolution of her understanding of the Kingdom of God in the world and in us.

In a letter to Father Lacordaire (1841) Marie Eugénie provides us with a synthesis which will rest unchanged. Her initial inspiration was exactly right.

- (1) “the future, the destiny, the moral nobility of our land” (to E.d’Alzon 12.3.44)
- (2) In the same letter, she shows the influence of the ideas received from “two men”:
“When I came to God later on, their ideas gave me strength.”
- (3) In addition to Lamennais, V.Hugo, Buchez, Bérulle, Thomas, Augustin.

³⁷ Addition of the number (3) that had been forgotten to be mentioned.

“To make Jesus Christ known, the liberator and king of the world, to teach that everything belongs to Him, that He wants to work in each one of us, for the great work of God’s Kingdom, that each one of us enters into his project, either to pray, or suffer, or to act; that to refuse it, under whatever pretext there might be, is to quit the greater good and take the route of egoism, I must admit that for me, this is the beginning and end of christian teaching... I do not feel obliged to say where I focus my attention in order to attain this goal, it is fixed entirely on Jesus Christ and the extension of His Kingdom.

Nothing can change the content of this text, fundamental³⁸ for us. But we can trace the long process by which Marie Eugénie came to understand the depths and heights of her intuition, and the manner by which this inspiration must be realised.

In the early years of her correspondence with Emmanuel d’Alzon, Marie Eugénie struggled to reconcile her ideas with the official teaching of the Church. She was able to submit herself humbly, without sparing herself the effort of continuing her own research and of being faithful to her own experience.

There was not a “hair’s difference” between Lamennais’ ideas and her own, (26 June ,44) but she was horrified to discover in herself the same pride which could make her say, like Lamennais: “ They don’t understand...”

In her letter of 12 March 1844, she confessed: “It seems to me that I accept the opinions which exaggerate the temporal consequences of the Redemption (like those of Buchez, for example) because they are the ones which open the door for the opinions or – let us be frank – the political passions that I have shared...”

It is difficult to know in what exactly consisted the “exaggeration of the “temporal consequences of the Redemption”, because Marie Eugénie doesn’t explain. But placing the letter in its context (12.3.44), I believe that the young and ardent foundress had to find her balance between activity on behalf of God, and the action of God in what concerns the construction of the Kingdom.

Redemption does not operate in the world in the manner that Marie Eugénie imagined. The changing of the social and political structures will not bring about the coming of the Kingdom on earth. The changes are, on the contrary, the result of conversion of men to the Kingdom. It is the conversion which is essential.

At a certain moment, she was even led to conclude that perhaps it was necessary for her to renounce all temporal commitments for the Kingdom. It was perhaps the very existence of the congregation which was at stake. We don’t know. In any case, it is clear that Marie Eugénie was ready to give up everything except her “love for His Kingdom here.” It was up to God to tell her what form that love would take.

“On my way to the Archbishop’s this morning, I entered Notre-Dame. There I had a moment of deep recollection. In the place where one upon a time I received the whole-hearted desire to vanquish everything in order to work for the extension of Jesus Christ’s Kingdom, I realised that perhaps, at that time, I thought only of Christ’s temporal kingdom; but He, seeing His inner ruling of my soul, drew me by a secret love in order to possess me and appropriate my heart, this being His unique goal, whereas I only thought

³⁸ Instead of « fundamental » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

of the mission that He could have given me; that today I may have to quit even the preoccupation with the thoughts which had formerly separate me from the world, in order to give myself over to this jealous love.

If it is necessary, I will make the sacrifice to God, in order to apply myself solely³⁹ to my relationship with Him, but at the same time, I implore Him to preserve in me the spirit of love for His Kingdom here on earth.” (Letter to E.d’Alzon/ undated – N°1581)

God will confirm her deepest desires; the Assumption’s vocation will be to work for the Kingdom by means of an interior conversion and the transformation of the social structures in the world which is the result.

Through the years, the events purified and refined her convictions. The Revolution of 1848 was a painful deception. The political changes took place in a blood-bath, and did not bring about the “society of the future for which our yearning hastens the coming”. (March 1848)

In 1870, there was a new trial and purification. France was unfaithful to her christian vocation. The anti-religious controversies at the end of the century were especially⁴⁰ painful for her. She almost saw her life’s work perish.

Mother Marie Eugénie never stopped desiring, praying, working, but increasingly, her hope was in God alone.

IV- WHAT IS THE IMPORTANT ELEMENT FOR US?

In her conception of the Kingdom, I find that Marie Eugénie has given us the foundation and the core of our unity of life.

- In the first place, we meet her Christocentricity again: Jesus is the coming of the Kingdom; to make Jesus live in us, to make Jesus known and loved, is to work for the extension of the Kingdom. Jesus, the Incarnation, union of Heaven and earth, is the Kingdom.
- Unity of the intellectual, social and religious aspects of our life:
 - Make known the truth of the Kingdom: there is no conflict between faith and reason, science and faith.
 - To transform society: imbue the structures and institutions with the Gospel.
- Unity of our life: a life the origin of which was a passion for the kingdom (“pensée de zèle”).
 - Clearly, resolutely and without ambiguity, the congregation is apostolic.
 - But this implies the whole of the religious life lived in its fullness, “to be and to be religious, is the same thing for me”- a life lived for God.

³⁹ « solely » instead of « soley » » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴⁰ Instead of « specially » » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- The Kingdom in myself, in others, in the world.

For us, the effort to live according to the Gospel and to let Jesus live in us is quite as important as the apostolic activity that we might undertake. To spread the Kingdom of God implies both the personal, interior life and the work of service given to others. Time and again Marie Eugénie returns to this fundamental point, that being is quite as important as doing.

- We cannot place in opposition action and contemplation, action and prayer, work for the Kingdom and work for oneself, transformation of society and transformation of yourself by the Gospel.

In the context of time, one must set different activities: personal and corporate prayer, work in solitude, work with others, community time, a time for missionary activity, but there is only one vision: JESUS – the KINGDOM:

“My attention is centred entirely on Jesus Christ and the extension of his Kingdom.”

The means are the means of faith: unselfishness
obedience
humility
prayer
work
dependence on God alone.

A philosophy: the ultimate truth is one. It is impossible to have a conflict between faith and reason, Law and Gospel.

A passion: that of faith, love, the realisation of the Gospel.

A well-tempered character: the life of Jesus in us
Freedom of spirit, the moral development of the person.

July 14, 1980

THE KINGDOM

According to Scripture

Sr Clare Teresa

I- The REIGN of God was for the Jew the heart and the summit of his hopes.

At the school of the Old Testament, the Jews had learned that God reigned and had reigned from all eternity. Psalm 93, 95, 59; Ps 22, 29; ps. 103, ; ps. 145, 11-13 etc.

When the time of salvation would come, the Jews also expected the triumphal manifestation of God's sovereignty.⁴¹ Isaias 52, 7

It is not a question of spatial kingdom so much as the establishment and universal recognition of God's sovereignty⁴². God is God.

This expectation was based on the historical experience of the People of Israel. But this expectation was also in bitter contrast with the reality which the Jewish people encountered daily and their hope became eschatological. All the magnificent acts which God had worked for their salvation in the past, such as the Exodus and the Covenant, were expected in a future and these acts would be repeated in a more glorious and fuller way. The Jews at the time of Jesus were awaiting a NEW Covenant, a NEW Exodus. And with Daniel 2, 44 we see the appearance of a transcendent⁴³ aspect of their hope.

The form that this eschatological expectation takes is not that of a dream to be accomplished in the future time but especially of a word of consolation and comfort in a situation of oppression. (Isaias passim) Hope is transposed according to past experience; there is a firm belief that God will manifest Himself in the end as the Absolute Lord of the entire universe.

In Jesus' time, the fullness of time, the Pharisees awaited a Kingdom that would be the fulfilment⁴⁴ of the Torah. The zealots dreamed of a political theocracy which would be established by force of arms. Others understood the coming of God's reign as a new era which would be the inauguration of a new heaven and a new earth.

Concretely, the Jews expected a reign of JUSTICE which meant that those who were weak, helpless and poor would be aided and protected. The coming of God's reign of justice in this world signified liberation from unjust powers. The reign of God would consist in peace among peoples, among individuals, within the person and within the whole cosmos.

⁴¹ Instead of "sovereignty" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴² Instead of "sovereignty" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴³ Instead of "transcendant" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴⁴ Instead of "fulfillment" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

II- The Reign of God is inaugurated in the person and action of JESUS.

The coming, the approach of the Kingdom of God is the central message of Jesus; it is the Good News. “This is the time of fulfilment⁴⁵. The Reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the Good News!” Mk. 1,15

For John the Baptist, the coming of the Kingdom means the threat of judgment. But for Jesus it is first of all the time, the offer of salvation. It is the Good News which surpasses all that men could expect or dream of. His appearance marks a break with the past, a fundamental change in all relations and an unequalled new beginning. Lk.7, 22; Mt.11, 5.

The powers of evil would be defeated and would lose their power over men⁴⁶. Mt. 12, 28; Lk. 11,20

There would be a new creation defined by life, liberty, peace, reconciliation, love.

Indeed, the Salvation proclaimed by Jesus means the coming of the God who is Love. The Love of God who gives Himself to man begins to reign both in man and by man. Love becomes not only the meaning of life but also the fulfilment⁴⁷ of both man and the world. When the very substance of all reality, the Love of God breaks through and reigns in the world, the world re-finds order, peace and salvation (wholeness).

Then appears the possibility of the world’s transformation and humanisation as the result of love’s violence.

Love will never replace justice; it is, on the contrary, the superabundance of justice. Love includes all the demands of justice and goes even further. Love is the very soul of justice – the salvation of man and of the world.

When Jesus reveals God to us, it is the word “Abba, Father”, that condenses his conception of God. God is the Lord of Love, Lord above all Lords in His Love. Each person in His kingdom knows that he⁴⁸ is accepted totally, absolutely, and infinitely loved. He becomes free and can enter into communion with others.

The paternal love of God seeks that which is lost, heals that which is wounded and gives life to the dead. Everything is transformed in the radiance of His Love. Henceforward, all is possible. “Our Father... your Kingdom come.” (Mt. 6,10)

III- In the Synoptics, Jesus speaks constantly of the Kingdom. He does not, however, give us a definition; the Kingdom is a mystery which He presents to us in a variety of images – often in Parables. And, as with the whole of the Gospel, the Kingdom brings us face to face with paradox.

The Kingdom implies a reversal of situations such as we find in the Beatitudes: happiness is promised to the poor, those who weep, those who are persecuted etc... and this happiness is participation in the Kingdom. (Participation in the Kingdom means for Jesus – and for John- Life) Mk.9,43;10, 17 . Lk. 18,18

The Kingdom comes in littleness and obscurity. It is an invisible reality “which cannot be observed.” (Lk.17,20) It’s inner reality is hidden, here and now, in a present which is scandalously banal and ordinary.

⁴⁵ Instead of “fulfillment”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴⁶ Instead of “man ind” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴⁷ Instead of “fulfillment” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁴⁸ Instead of “He” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

As the mustard seed becomes a tree (Mt.13,31) that which is great is hidden and active in that which is small.

Moreover the Kingdom is a mystery which is revealed to the little ones. (Mt. 11, 25) But the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than the most important man in the world. (Mt 11, 11)

The most striking paradox of the Kingdom is manifested when the Kingdom will be realised in the night of the failure.

IV- A certain urgency is felt in the preaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom – it is now that The Kingdom arrives among men.

- It is the coming of the bridegroom : Mk. 2,19; Jn.2,1-11
- It is the harvest time: Mt. 9,37; Jn. 4, 35

The miracles (signs) wrought by Jesus proclaim the presence of the Kingdom and let the witnesses see into the full meaning of that presence. Its coming marks the end of Satan 's domination, of the power of sin and death over mankind: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I expect demons, it is because the Kingdom of God has arrived to you." (Mt.12,28)

The coming of the Kingdom, however, demands that we take a stand, make a decision. Although the Kingdom is the absolutely free gift of God – since it is the exclusive concern of God and cannot be merited, earned, conquered or calculated – man is obliged to accept or refuse. (See the series of parables (Mt. 13, 44-45). He remains free in his response, to take or to leave it. He has to decide for or against...

Thus, the Kingdom is a call to conversion, especially to belief (faith). Man is called to believe in the Good News; he has to believe in Jesus in order to enter the Kingdom. God, Himself, has come close to men in the person of Jesus. It is God who offers Himself to man.

As in the parable of the banquet, God invites men, encourages them, even presses them to come into the Kingdom – yet man remains free.

Indeed the dialogue between God and man means that the Kingdom exists in the world in the measure that the Word is received in the hearts of men. (Mt.13, 23) When the Word is received in an open heart, God can act.⁴⁹ Faith permits God to be God⁵⁰ in His world and gives Him glory. By faith, we can say that the Kingdom of God becomes a concrete reality in history. Thus human history moves forward in a dialogue between the Creator and His creature. It is not just the unfolding of a pre-ordained divine - or human – plan.

God's invitation and promise opens up new possibilities to man. Indeed, all is possible. The concrete realisation of the Kingdom depends on faith or disbelief.

As we said above, man is free in his response⁵¹, but he cannot not take a stand in face of the offer of the Kingdom. The message of Jesus that the Kingdom is at hand is an offer that commands a radical decision. Some response must be given. In this sense, the message of Jesus, the Word of God, can be either salvation or judgment.

V- The Kingdom of God is a reality that is already present but the parables of growth (Mt.13) imply a period of time between the historical inauguration of the Kingdom and its perfect fulfilment. There is a certain tension between the present and the future when the Kingdom will come in its

⁴⁹ Added in the English translation : « He can be God". (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵⁰ Added in the English translation : " in His world" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵¹ Instead of "reponse" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

fullness (Lk. 21, 31). The Passover will have been accomplished and men will participate in the eschatological banquet.

At the end of time God will be all in all (I Cor. 15, 28). His Lordship will be established over the entire creation. From now until then, the faithful beg God “May your Kingdom come!” and work to make it so!

The fact that the Kingdom remains a hidden reality in the present corresponds to the tension we find in the words of Jesus: some refer to the past and others to the future. Some sayings of Jesus concern the coming of the Kingdom in the here-and-now, others take us back to the past or forward to the future; the coming is promised, expected and begged for.

As we have already seen, the Kingdom is both in the process of coming and offered to the free decision of those to whom it is proclaimed. The Kingdom is a power to which the future belongs; it impels men to decide in such a way that we can say it is both active in the present and a determination for the future. (decisive for the future) For Jesus to speak of the present is to speak of the future and vice versa. The future of God is salvation for the one who seizes the present moment as the time of salvation. It is judgment for the one who refuses God’s “today” and clings to his own past, present or future.

The present moment is a situation of eschatological⁵² decision. The “coming” of God is God’s appeal to man in the present and the present is the time of decision in the light of the future coming (à venir) of God.

VI- The Cross and the Kingdom are intimately united. Jesus willed and accepted the conflict that his Person and his message would arouse. He did not see His death as the ultimate consequence of his courage but as the summary⁵³ and summit of his message. By his death on the Cross the Kingdom would be brought to accomplishment in time. The deliverance which would spring up within the anguish of death would transform that anguish into the place of the Kingdom’s birth, of God’s Lordship in poverty, of love in abandonment, of plenitude in emptiness, of life in death.

At the Last Supper Jesus foresaw not only his death but also the Kingdom which would come with his death and through it. “I solemnly assure you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine, until I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God.” Mk. 14, 25

In extreme solitude and in the dark night of naked obedience, Jesus abandons to the will of his Father the choice as to how the Kingdom is to come. His obedient death is for us the essence, the summing up and the crowning of his entire work.

The powerlessness, poverty and scant outward appearance with which the Kingdom begins in his person and actions reaches a scandalous degree and it will continue to cause scandal down through the ages.

Since the Paschal event, we can speak of the Kingdom of Christ. (The Passion according to St. John presents Jesus as King.) Henceforward, too, we are sure of victory over evil and that the history of the world will finish in triumph.

VII- The decision for the Kingdom is not a simple “yes” for a moment. Although the Kingdom is the supreme gift of God, it has its price. To have it, we must be ready to sacrifice everything, as for the pearl of great price or the hidden treasure. (Mt. 13, 44; Mk. 1, 47)

⁵² Instead of “eschatological” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵³ Instead of “resumé”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

There are also certain requirements for entrance into the Kingdom:

- keep the precepts of the Law⁵⁴ (Mt. 5,19)
- seek for the Kingdom and its justice (Mt.6,33)
- possess holiness (justice) that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt. 5,20)
- become as little children (Mt. 18, 4; Lk. 18,16-17)
- be energetic (Mt. 11,12: “The violent take it by force”)
- the Kingdom belongs to the poor ‘in spirit’ (Mt.5,3) and it will be difficult for the rich to have entry (Mt. 19,24; Mk 10,23; Lk. 18,25)
- above all, Jesus demands a charity which manifests itself in works for others (Mt.25,35)
- do the Father’s will (Mt. 7,21)

Jesus calls us to conversion, to a new birth. We have to be vigilant (Mt. 25, 1-13) and not look back (Lk. 9, 62)

VIII- The disciples in turn should proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (Lk.9).

The twelve are sent to preach and heal.

The “little flock” of Jesus gives a visible form to the Kingdom (Lk. 12,32) and constitutes the Church.

The Church is the partial realisation of the Kingdom in contemporary reality. She is sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the world. In the Church the will of the Father is publicly acknowledged and in her community the faithful experience the Kingdom. They celebrate until the end of time the Eucharist – the eschatological⁵⁵ sign in action by which Jesus invites the faithful to participate already in the eschatological⁵⁶ banquet.

To Peter, Jesus has given the keys of the Kingdom. (Mt. 16,19)

The Church recognises in her littleness and weakness the manner in which God has chosen to realise the Redemption of the human race.

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⁵⁴ Instead of “the law” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵⁵ Instead of “eschatological” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵⁶ Instead of “eschatological” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 15, 1980

M. Hélène Marie

YOU WILL LEAVE ALL THAT YOU LOVE TO WORK
FOR THIS CHURCH YOU DO NOT YET KNOW
(MOI ⁵⁷ c 19)

“As I returned from the altar rails, I was very shy of crossing the choir where the canons were, and I was wondering how to get back to my mother, when I heard a voice inside me saying: “One day you will leave all that you love, to work for this church which you do not yet know.” It was the first intimation of my vocation.”

(Conversation 1888, MOI c19)

This was in 1829. This uncovenanted gift of God to Marie Eugénie, the first, unsought revelation of his love, came to her, from the very beginning, through the Church, and as a call to service of the Church. A few years later, writing to Lacordaire of what her attendance at his sermons in 1836 had meant to her, she explained: “I was genuinely converted, and I longed to give all my strength, or rather all my weakness, to the Church which hence forward seemed to me to hold the only key to the knowledge and power of Goodness here on earth.” (Or. I, p.52)

But nevertheless, in these same years a kind of jolt can be felt in the progress of her newly-discovered faith; in 1836 she remarked herself on “the slight tinge of protestantism in my catholicism which makes me more easily convinced by the evidence of my intelligence than by the authority and customs of the Church.” (NI 1836) Then again, she wrote to the Abbé Combalot from la Côte St. André: “I wish you would not keep forbidding me to read anything that doesn’t quite fit in with your ideas. I can only clarify and fill out my views through confrontation with contrary ones.” (1.15.37) And in 1841, writing again to Lacordaire:” But the members of the Church...I imagined them apostles! Later, I was to find that they were only men! This, to be frank, Father, is at the root of the fits of bitterness and hopelessness, which sometimes torment me.” (13.12.41)

And so there are two elements in Marie Eugénie’s response to the Church – the mystical insight – that is the direct action of God – and the reactions of a lively, independent temperament often disillusioned and perplexed by the limitations of churchmen. This was the foundation, the native soil, in which Marie Eugénie’s love of the Church was to develop – a love expressed through fidelity to her traditions, through a sound theological understanding of what she is, a great personal devotion to the pope, unconditional obedience to Church⁵⁸ authority and through prayer, work, and suffering in her service. These are the aspects of her life and teaching which we shall consider today.

Marie Eugénie’s love of the Church is touchingly expressed in her Chapters, at the same time as her eagerness that we should share it. “You should have a passionate love of the Church, reflected in your prayer and your work for the apostolate... If the heart of a sister of the Assumption could be opened, what ought to be found in it? Three loves – Christ, Our Lady, and the Church.” (1878, p.107) She was writing in the same strain as early as 4th April 1838: “Jesus, Mary, the Church – there is our

⁵⁷ Instead of “Moi, c 19” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁵⁸ Instead of “church authority”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

motto. May we become fools for their sake, humbled, and let their glory shine out, let it be extended.” (NI 161)

In an unpublished Chapter of 1858, 14th November: “It is the feast of the Church, the Proto-type, the true creation, (of which the ages are no more than the image), of the pure, spotless Bride of Christ whom we should love so deeply, especially we who share her wonderful title of ‘Bride’.” (MOI Gc 3) Elsewhere she says “religious women are the heart of the Church.” (1884, p.13) And again, “You should have the same love for the Church as we have for Christ.” (1881, p. 247) Loving the Church means loving her as she is and in all that she is: “Love the Church in what she teaches, in her customs, her history, her traditions, her devotions, in all that she asks of us, in what she has been, in what she is, in her hierarchy, in each one of her members. “ (1878, p. 102) If, in this way, we become the Church’s loving children, “everything connected with the Church, everything that affects her, everything that is of moment to her, everything that has to do with her, will engage our thoughts, our feelings, our prayers; our concern for her will be constant and enduring.” (1873, p.243) She summed it all up in a clear cut phrase: “The love of Jesus Christ and of the Church is our principal characteristic.” (1878, p.51) The Rule of Life faithfully continues along this tradition, where it says: “Christ asks us to love the Church.” (Introduction, Rule of Life, p.6)

From this love of the Church comes fidelity to tradition, to the teaching of the Church. “From the start we intended and we still intend, to adopt the ideas and traditions of the Church. We were not thinking of doing anything new, very far from it. Our only idea was to learn from the long-established traditions of the Church.” (1889, p.420) This explains our customs, our king of asceticism, formation in prayer, the Office, preference for books with a solid theological basis and all that comes down to us from this insight of Marie Eugénie’s. It is a matter of laying sound foundations: “We build on the Rock which is the Church.” (August 1, 1880) “We must believe all that the Roman Church believes and teaches. We should love all that the Head of that Church proposes for our belief... We should cling to the truths which it teaches us...” and she continues with humorous shrewdness: “People are willing to believe what the Church teaches on the sacraments but reject what she teaches on modern doctrines. Outside the sacristy and the sacraments, people want to be their own master and manage their lives at they see fit.” (1876, p.168-169)

Two years later, in the great chapters on the spirit of the Assumption: “Before anything else, we must believe all that the Church believes quite simply and from the real motive of Faith which is, that it is God who speaks to us and that the Church is moved by the Holy Spirit in all that she initiates, and in all that she proposes.” (1878, p.45) More emphatically still, Marie Eugénie says: “We ought to hate all that is independent of the authority of the Church and of the Faith, all that diverges even in the slightest degree from Catholic teaching: we must not love the extraordinary, but in all matters of doctrine, always to go what is most reliable. In our readings, in our studies, we must seek what is sound. Life is not long enough to read all the good books... Let us leave aside those which are suspect.” (1878, p. 45) Marie Eugénie often insisted on this point; her own experience and the Spirit within her had both been at work in the 19-year old who had begged the Abbé Combalot to let her read everything. (cf. above): she had just discovered Faith enlightened by grace. I will quote only one last sentence on this theme. It has become a commonplace for us, but it is none the less very beautiful: “We must be nourished by light in order to give light.” (1878 p.105)

But what was the ecclesiology of Marie Eugénie in those 19th Century days which now seem so remote? What was her Theology of the Church? Let her speak for herself: “Jesus Christ established between himself and the Church a perfect unity... As God incarnate, he is the Head and his members take shape little by little in the course of the centuries.” (1881, p.247) In her Private notes:

“Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, we are his members.” (NI, No. 162, 3.2.1839) Still further: “The Church is the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is its Head and by this very fact, we are his members.” (1884, p.12) “. . . Our Lord is the Head of the Mystical Body, the Church. He is in the Church. . . The Church is his Bride, she is also his Body.” (1878, p.100) We might imagine that we are listening to St. Paul: “You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone.” (Eph. 2, 20) And this one, already quoted: “The Church is moved by the Holy Spirit.” (1878, p.45) While insisting on the Spirit of Jesus Christ⁵⁹, the corner-stone of the Body⁶⁰, Marie Eugénie anticipates Vatican II: “The Church as People of God”, since she exclaims: “What is the Church? It is the assembly of the faithful under its duly appointed pastors.” (1880, p.103) The Church is the assembly⁶¹ of the People of God, it is built up in charity and communion, it is the place where love is given us.

For Marie Eugénie, to believe in the Church is not primarily to believe in the sacraments, but to believe in Jesus Christ. But for her, there is “The Church in Heaven as well. . . the most beautiful part of the Church.” (1878, p.109-110) She recommends us to make friends with all the saints of Heaven and not just some of them: the Saints of the Gospels, the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Doctors. . . the Saints whose feasts occur each day. But after having been reminded of her First Communion, it is interesting to hear Marie Eugénie tell us: “The Church is a good mother; she gives excellent things to all.” (1878, p.54) For Marie Eugénie, the Church is really the act of God; that is why she accompanies mankind along the path of history towards the future to which she is the key.

Marie Eugénie had a prophetic vision of the truly catholic and universal Church of the future. Appealing to St. Augustine, she says: “That great Doctor had a heart as wide as the Church; a mind as broad as the Church too. In him there is nothing eccentric or exclusive. . . It is to be hoped that we shall always preserve the great St. Augustine breadth of outlook and sense of the Church. He always served and loved her with such generosity of heart.” (1878, p.52) And Marie Eugénie spells it out for us: “Our particular character must be authentically Catholic; and avoiding everything odd or eccentric, we should build into our lives whatever is part of the life of the Church.” (1878, p.108) “It is good to leave the narrow confines of our personal cares to fill ourselves with the thoughts of the Church.” (1878, p.38). Finally, here is a sentence which makes it clear that we are to reject everything individualistic, narrow, sectarian: “Our spirit must be enriched by the spirit of the Church.” (1878, p.45) “Our love must be that which, from the beginning of time, was kindled in the Church by Our Lord Jesus Christ. In this connection, all the doctors of the Church, all the religious, all the saints of all times have lessons to teach us; let us not limit ourselves to the teachings of any order in particular.” (1878, p.52)

Marie Eugénie’s view of the Church has the ring of orthodoxy. It must be added that a strong emphasis is put on the Pope, as if he were the basis and cause of our love for the Church: “We have a special characteristic, a particular attachment to the Chair of St. Peter, center of Truth, must we not also consecrate our whole life to the love and service of the Church? “ (1878, p.26) She was to welcome with joy the dogma of infallibility, in a Church which was then divided on the question. Marie Eugénie was to live, as foundress, under three Popes: Gregory XVI (1831-1846), Pius IX (1846-1878), Leo XIII (1878-1903). Her attachment to the Vicar of Christ stemmed also from a refusal to

⁵⁹ The omission of « tout en insistant” : “WHILE », can change the meaning of the phrase. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶⁰ Instead of a different punctuation and the addition of a word: “the corner-stone; Head of the Body, M.E anticipates. . .”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶¹ Instead of “Assembly” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

accept the narrow loyalties of Gallicanism; in this way she wanted to reduce the sectarianism of the Church of France; she had a horror of putting on the blinders of a party allegiance.⁶² And so she made four trips to Rome: the first in 1866, by boat, to ask for approval for the Institute; before the private audience with Pius IX⁶³, she wrote: “I need to pray a great deal before going to see the Pope, I would like to spend two or three hours before the Blessed Sacrament”; the second voyage took place in 1876, by train, with Mère Thérèse Emmanuel; she saw a very aged Pius IX – it was the end of his pontificate. He was to die in 1878, the year Marie Eugénie gave us her most important chapters in which she has much to say of Pius IX. We might suppose that this is due to a purely emotional response to his death; but she had written before this: “The daughters of the Assumption must always be attached to the Pope and the Church by an affection directed not just to Pius IX, but to all the Popes who are to follow him...” and she continues: “Conformity to the dogmas and definitions is not enough for us. May we always seek to conform our aims to the intentions of the Holy Father, to follow the way he takes and to make it our goal.” (June 3, 1877). And again: “A great devotion to the Pope must be in all our hearts.” (18.11.1877) In the same chapter: “The Pope is the father of all the faithful, the representative of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. He is the Head of the Church.” (18.11.1877) – “He is the Head, the Mouth and the Heart of the Church.” (1878, p.101) There are letters that give us picturesque and touching details of what went on at the Assumption at the time of the death of Pius IX, the pope who “approved the Institute and brought it into being.” (1878, p.34 and 1879, p.397) On February 6th, unaware that this was the day before Pius IX, she was preparing a gift for him (eventually to be given to Leo XIII) and she wrote: “We want to lay at the Pope’s feet a beautiful book containing the addresses of all our Houses with photographs of all the convents – this, as soon as possible. So, we are sending you large sheets of very fine quality paper to be signed at the places we indicate...” (8006). An exchange of letters and gifts follows. On Feb. 15th of the same year, ’78, she wrote to the Archbishop of Paris: “I come to ask Your Lordship’s permission to keep the Blessed Sacrament exposed all night... we will spend those 24 hours of adoration asking God for a Pope according his heart, since the first ballot is to take place on Wednesday.” (3894) And on February 21st, eight days later: “We are happy to have a Pope and that He is Cardinal⁶⁴ Pecci who has been so much praised. We⁶⁵ have to give him all the love that Pius IX inspired us and above all make sure that prayer for the Pope continues. Leo XIII will need it; he must be ready to meet so many difficulties.” (8010)

The third voyage of Marie Eugénie to Rome was in 1888, to ask the definitive approval of the Constitutions. We all know that from this journey, Marie Eugénie brought back the approved Constitution and, returning via Cannes, placed them on Mère Thérèse Emmanuel’s bed, the day before her death. Marie Eugénie gave much time, care, and anxious thought to the editing of successive Constitutions, attaching great importance to the approval of the Holy Father. “You know that our Constitutions have just received the definitive approval of the Holy See and you are, like us, delighted by this grace, which gives our Institute the seal of the Church’s authority.” (Chapter, May 30, 1888) She remarks with filial affection in a chapter of 1879 (p.396) that the Popes watch over us, work for us by approving the Institute, the Rule, confessors, the election of superiors, etc... the 4th and 5th voyages of Marie Eugénie take place in 1893 and 1895, the last when she was very tired and already had Mère Marie Célestine as Vicar.

⁶² Instead of “allegiance” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶³ Instead of “Pius IX” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶⁴ Instead of “Cardinal” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶⁵ Instead of “We” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

It is appropriate to end this section on loyalty to the Holy Father, with words she wrote from Rome in May, 1866, at the time of her first voyage: “I prayed a great deal for the Congregation and I asked St. Peter that love of the Church may always be our main characteristic. May the Congregation perish if it is not always lovingly united to the See of Rome.” This needs no commentary.

- I will only say a few words on the unconditional obedience of Marie Eugénie to the Church and so, to her representatives, because we already know it. She continually repeats the sentence from the psalm: “I have chosen to obey.” She is always wanting to lay down her office so as to be able to obey, wishes to obey her director, Fr. d’Alzon, scrupulously, makes a special vow of obedience to him in April ’46. As for her obedience to Fr. Combalot, it is well-known: she speaks of it humorously in conversations at recreation: “We were so convinced of the necessity of obedience that we would have thought it impossible to do otherwise than as he told us... and he kept constantly changing his mind... I was also at that time, in poor health, so they were obliged to take care of me. Well, one day he told me: “ my dear child, you are weak, you look ill, you must take care of yourself, you must eat meat on Fridays and Saturdays.” I did as he said. Fifteen days later he came again: ‘ But this is terrible – did you ever hear of anything like it: a nun who does not observe the laws of the Church! When will you ever make up for all the fasts and abstinences that you have missed? You really need to do penance.’ Then I would say, ‘Very well, Father, I will fast.’ ” (MO 1 1 C 2a) And here we have a remark we are well acquainted with: “If the Assumption exists, it is because the first sisters obeyed, simply and without discussion, an authority which, I must admit, was sometimes unreasonable.”

She obeyed unconditionally, too, in accepting the break with Lamennais; though sharing his vision of a great Catholic renaissance, she submitted without hesitation, but not without suffering, as did the Abbé Combalot, Lacordaire and d’Alzon. We have already seen her fidelity to the teaching of the Church, to all that She says, teaches, proposes. She speaks several times of the prudence there is in knowing the Church’s Rules and following them. (Undated manuscript and 1878, p.156). With regard to the Index, she wrote in 1857: “ Not only do I embrace from obedience, all the intentions of the Holy Church, the Rule of the Index, but I am happy to allow myself to be guided by her wisdom, so truly wise, and I find this rule so perfect that even if it were not universally applicable, I would want it for us. We can think of the decisions invested with the authority of the Pope as barriers and not want to cross them; quite rightly. But isn’t it better still to love them enough to make them our light and our support in the management of everything⁶⁶ in life?” What a valuable insight! In fact, Marie Eugénie did not obey blindly but cooperated freely, forestalling and transcending all constraint. This is how she achieved a sound critical outlook, lucid and frank. When Gregory XVI granted an audience which was likely to be given an unfortunate interpretation, to Tzar Nicholas, persecutor of the Catholic Poles: “I want to tell you of my grief, which, too, must feel no less, if there is any truth in what is said. They say the Pope is making the most magnificent preparations to receive Tzar Nicholas. We, who have seen his victim as such close-range feel a sorrow which will be all too readily shared by every member of the Catholic Church, who has a human heart. What a weapon the Papacy is putting in its enemy’s hands!... What dishonour it is incurring, by the incredible weakness which dares in the very presence of the martyrs, to honour their executioners.” (to Fr. d’Alzon, vol. 8. 1961- 2.12.1845)

- Marie Eugénie speaks, especially in a Chapter of 1881, of working, suffering and praying for the Church. Working she did, at the expense of her health, within the Congregation and outside it:

⁶⁶ Instead of “ever thing” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

she worked for the local Church – we remember Mgr. Affre and his answers to the missionary Bishops; she worked for the Fathers of the Assumption, sending them vocations, helping them financially and in all sorts of other ways. She lent the Oblates Mère M. Madeleine in 1865-66, the M. Marie Emmanuel in 1866-67, M. Marie du Christ in 1886; after having guided Fr. PERNET in his vocation, she helped him and Marie Fage with the foundation of the Little Sisters; she had an important relationship with Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, future Foundress of the Orantes, when the latter was a lady-boarder at Cannes, not to mention the Polish Fathers of the Resurrection, the welcome given to Mother Macrine, the Polish martyr, and her numerous contacts with the great Congregations: Dominicans, Jesuits, Benedictines. She never lacked opportunity for taking the initiative because of the great breadth of her interests. She wrote in 1878: “We must work for the Church and make all our life one of entire dedication to the Church;” (p.26) And in 1881: “How does the Church grow? Through the work of men who make Jesus Christ known...let us apply ourselves with courage and generosity to the work which the Church of God declares so important and which is our work.” (1884, p.246) But Marie Eugénie adds something that goes straight to the heart in today’s Congregation: “The second thing which builds up the Church of Jesus Christ is persecution.” (1881, p.249); “If persecution comes to you, it will do its work, it will make us living stones, fashioned and adorned, fit to form the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem... The life of the Church must grow in us through suffering.” (1881, p.250) How good it is for us to hear this. It is like an echo of what a persecuted Russian priest writes today: “The Church is strong when she is crucified, when she is persecuted.” (Father Doudko) Persecution can be violent and bloody, coming from the outside; it can also come from inside the Church itself; Marie Eugénie experienced persecution by narrow, gallicanising authoritarian churchmen but she stayed in the Church, awaiting the moment in which those very failings would be gloriously transfigured.

Living in a period of history when shadows sometimes obscured the light, travelling painfully as part of a pilgrim Church Marie Eugénie suffered passionately, because it was in communion with the Passion of Jesus that the Church revealed itself to her daily, more and⁶⁷ more. And there, in the doubts and uncertainty of daily choices, in conflicts like those which were chronicled from the earliest days, the days of the Acts of the Apostles, she saw the Church as “the plenitude of him whom God himself filled totally.” (Eph. 1, 23)

- As well as working for the Church, suffering for her and by her, Marie Eugénie adds the call to pray for her and with her: “We should pray for the Church.” (1878, p.26) – “Pray especially for the needs of the Church today, so many and so pressing.” To pray with the Church, in the line of the 19th Century current of liturgical renewal, associated with Dom Guéranger, Marie Eugénie endowed us the Great Roman Office “one of the sources of our way of life and the one from which we can and should draw the spirit of the Church.” (1889, p.420) We know that she suffered and what a struggle she had to keep the Office of the Universal Church. On this subject I would like to be able to quote her at length. Here is one at least: “The love of the Divine Office was one of the earliest characteristics of the Assumption, because the Office is the language of the Church and puts us in touch with all the saints of Heaven and⁶⁸ earth, because in the Office, we find everything to establish our piety in the soundest, most universal traditions of the Church, the epitome of all the praise that has been given God from the earliest times.” (Chapter, 1880)

⁶⁷ Instead of «qnd » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁶⁸ Instead of «qnd » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

But here we must end. Marie Eugénie loved the Church. As the years went on, the more she suffered from the Church and discovered her weakness, the more truly she loved it. And so Marie Eugénie lived a life of belonging to the Church, awaiting the dawn. But one day, in 1975, the Church exalted Marie Eugénie in Rome itself; the huge photograph of her, looking quite small against the splendour of Bernini's baldachin⁶⁹, while at the Altar directly above the tomb of Peter, Pope Paul VI declared Mère Marie Eugénie Milleret Blessed. Henceforth, she belongs to the Church in Heaven, to the Church which, having cast off the rags of her sinfulness, is glorified with the glory of the Son. Marie Eugénie dwells at last in the Church which no longer needs the light of the sun, nor of the moon, "since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it." (Rev. 21, 23)

⁶⁹ Instead of « Baldachino » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 16, 1980

S. Asuncion

THE CHURCH

The Church! Is there anything in the Christian world which provokes more controversy? She brings out the aggressivity of some, the contempt of others. Many, seeing her, desire to reform her, others would like to change her countenance. Need we continue to list the variety of contemporary attitudes in conflict with the Church? One thing is certain: it is impossible to be acquainted with the Church even slightly, and to be indifferent on her behalf. One of her own constant tasks has been the effort to express her true nature, the attempt to analyse her behaviour. The titles of certain publications are very revealing: “Vulnerable and enthralling Church” – “Models for a Church tending towards a more evangelical image”; they place us at the heart of the question, there where all the other questions are born.

We ourselves are marked by the problematic that the reality of the Church presents today. Yesterday we saw how Marie Eugénie was struck and mobilised by this Church which she loved passionately. Now I would like to suggest that we reflect a bit about the “mystery” of the Church, with its concrete implications, to try to understand the various accents which she has placed on herself down through history, as well as the temptations which beset her, in order to pose the question for ourselves: how to live the Church today?

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

Everything started at the moment when everything seemed to have finished. Jesus had just died on the cross. “When the soldiers came to Jesus, they found he was already dead and so instead of breaking his legs, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water.” (Jn 19,33-34). Jesus gave everything with His life, including the last drop of water and blood, signifying⁷⁰ the plenitude of His gift; from his pierced side flowed the water of the Spirit, which will give birth to the community of Jesus, the new woman and spouse. It is the new creation; from henceforth, the man who receives the Spirit receives the possibility to live in love, and to spread that love around him. In this movement of love is the fullness of man, the life which will never see death.

The community had been built around Jesus. The disciples, those who had been drawn to him by the Father, find themselves in a new realm; the journey in faith which is at the base of their experience, accomplished in them an exodus, an ecstasy: they quit the sin and injustice of the world in order to go towards Jesus. The company of disciples, the community of believers, became the “space” of liberty and love. The Spirit is the unction which consecrates the disciples and makes them capable of identifying themselves with the Lord and of continuing His work: they become His witnesses.

Mystery of the Church: she is called to live and to announce without ceasing, until the end of time, the boundless love of a God who became man, died and rose, in order to give life to the world.

⁷⁰ Instead of « signifying » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

“Go out into the whole world, proclaim the Gospel to all creatures” (Mc 16, 15). “I am with you always” (Mt 26, 20). Jesus’ community, the Church, prolongs the offering of life which the Father makes to mankind in Jesus. In “Lumen Gentium” this reality is expressed in the following terms: “All those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation, and the source of unity and peace, God has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity” (N°9) ; and also: “Christ ... sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples as the universal sacrament of salvation” (N° 48). “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of mankind” (N°1).

God’s love knows neither limit nor measure; risk and excess are its chief characteristics. He took a risk by making a handful of men, marked by their limitations and weakness “the chosen people”, the “holy vine”, the “field which He cultivates”, his “house”, the “holy temple”, the “Bride”, the “Body” of His Christ. (L.G. N° 6) God gives Himself to His Church in order that the Church in turn be the witness of the reality of the Father’s love, in the world. The Church is called to live the very life of God; she is sent everywhere in order to propose this life and salvation to everyone. Such is her vocation, her mystery.

The Church is the “universal sacrament of salvation”, the continuation of Christ’s presence in the world, visible in time and history. This sacramental reality gives rise to the paradox of the Church: she is holy and sinful, the body of Christ, yet on an historical pilgrimage. She is capable of liberating man in his totality and in his secret depths, but also, at certain moments of history, of oppressing the weak. The Church is the divine-human setting where our communion with God is made visible and takes form, without ever coming to its full and definitive manifestation.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church accomplishes her mission in the midst of the world; she is in the world but does not belong to the world (cf. Jn 17, 16). The Church discerns the “signs of the times” by the light of the word of salvation, and this activity enriches the world; the world, through its historical evolution, “contributes greatly”⁷¹ to the Church (Gaudium et Spes N° 44), who knows that “in working out her relationship with the world, she always has great need of the ripening which comes with the experience of the centuries” (GS, N° 43).

The historicity of the Church shows one facet of its dynamic, in constant progression towards truth and maturity, on a path leading towards perfection, and not yet arrived at her goal, sanctity acquired. “Already on this earth, the Church is marked with a genuine though imperfect holiness” (LG 48); she does not possess the fullness of divine truth but “as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment⁷² in in her” (Dei Verbum, N°8).

The Church is the seed of the Kingdom, having the mission to announce⁷³ and establish the Kingdom, without ever being able to identify herself completely with it. She waits for it, desiring it as the gratuitous completion of what is already being prepared, here and now, in time and space. The Church is always in a state of growth, of change, of maturation towards the fullness of God in her.

⁷¹ Instead of « contibues greatly » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁷² Instead of “fulfillment” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁷³ Instead of « annonce »

The historicity of the Church, her visible presence in time, is made concrete in her institutional dimension with its various components⁷⁴: Scripture, the Faith, the sacraments, pastoral authority, a ministry rooted in the apostolic succession. Furthermore, the Church in its visible and institutional form is a sacrament, that is, a reality which signifies (is a sign of) God's saving act in Jesus Christ, through the operation of the Spirit. The Church is always two things; institution and event. The two are intimately linked, the one always sending us back to the other. The institutional elements serve as signs or indications; "they show forth, here and now, the reality of the Event at the center of which is found the living God and the risen Christ; they bring about, here and now the novelty which has its⁷⁵ origine in the Event; they are given so that communion with the Event may be established in the history of men." (cf. "Le temps du défi." P. Liégé).

The institutional structure of the Church becomes the "vital environment" for the faith in Jesus Christ, for meeting Jesus Christ, the place where the believer finds support and protection in the belief of others. The Church, the community of those who help each other to believe doesn't exist of herself; she is not her own raison d'être; she must constantly transcend herself in order to go towards Jesus Christ, have her origins constantly before her: Jesus Christ, His word and His work, His life and His destiny.

The Church is not exempt from the temptations inherent to any institution: immobility, self-seeking, the quest for power, manipulation. Rapidly⁷⁶, we will scan her history, for a glimpse at the different faces which the Church has had throughout the ages, her deformations but also her richness.

THE IMAGES OF THE CHURCH IN HISTORY

I. The "cosmic" Church. From the second generation of Christianity on, the Church was confronted with two problems, which posed serious questions: the delay of the Parousia and the meeting with Hellenistic culture. The first placed her at the heart of time and history, there where she was obliged to find her place and her mission. The second question opened her to a universal dimension; in its context was born the image which the Church formed of herself – that of a "Church-world" or cosmos. The cosmos is the world in all its variety, but also its order and beauty; it is everything which is opposed to chaos, disorder; it is the whole of humanity to the degree that he has a form and a meaning, as a reflection of the "logos" which creates and forms.

During the first centuries, the Church affirmed herself to be the work of the Logos. On her face shone the humble beauty of the Word-made-flesh. In her was revealed the order of God's program or plan of salvation. The world, in contrast with her, is chaos and sin. For the Church, the world is a task to accomplish. The Church does not consider herself to be absent, a foreigner; she conceives of herself as an agent committed in its destiny.

The dangers of this attitude were the temptations to domination and power.

⁷⁴ Instead of « componants »

⁷⁵ Instead of « is »

⁷⁶ Instead of « rapidly »

II. “The City of God”. The expression is familiar to us, thanks to St Augustine. The historical moment, and very critical:⁷⁷ Fifth century, when Rome was invaded by the “barbarians”. The Church, after having known the temptation to hide behind the temporal authorities for protection, experienced the limitations and the futility of all human power. It was then that history got simplified, and events acquired their meaning. The ultimate significance of history is the construction of the city, the human community. Love, of oneself⁷⁸ or of God, is the constructive force.

In this perspective, the world is the place where the citizens of the Church are called and recruited, citizens who live here as strangers and foreigners. This attitude provided a certain distance from the present situation which rendered the pain more tolerable, but at the same time obscured the Church’s raison d’être in the world. This manner of conceiving the Church’s role will return fairly often in critical moments of her history; this vision of the two cities would be active throughout the middle ages, and come right down to our day.

III. “The Holy, Hierarchical Church” The hierarchical structure of the Church has its origin in Christ, but the middle ages provoked a movement which accentuated the vertical structure of the entire Church, because of its own social structure, that of feudalism with its personal relations of subordination. One result of this movement was a certain displacement: the Church came to be identified with the hierarchy, which in turn became the center of power, of safety, of domination over the Faithful and society. The concept of the “People” which hitherto referred⁷⁹ to the entire Church, was applied to the “laity” as opposed to the clergy, the hierarchy.

This model of the Church is both efficient and forceful, one sees a Church united, gathered around the Pope, the bishops and the priests. She is attractive and reassuring because of her personality and her strength, capable of giving rise to considerable nostalgia even today.

The consequences of such a conception of the Church are fairly clear: there is a certain impoverishment in the reality of the Church. The Spirit and love take a lesser place than juridical authority and submission; the sense of liberty and fraternity in the Christian community diminishes a bit; the lay man loses conscience of his responsibility, he becomes a passive member who must be directed; the hierarchical⁸⁰ borrows⁸¹ external usages which are⁸² much more suitable to the “secular” powers. The image of the Church is rather distant from that of the Servant who came to serve and to give his life.

IV. “The Church Militant”. This is the manner in which the modern Church conceived of herself, from the XVIth century down. It is the characteristic image of the Counter-Reformation Church: a Church which “fights” in this world on behalf of God. Like the militia, she lives her life and mission as a service without limits.

The new horizons opened by the modern age offered the Church a whole series of objectives, urgent and thrilling, which set her on her feet and kindled her to action. A young Church, full of energy and idealism; life is renewed in her: the saints flourish, the religious orders multiply, the movements for

⁷⁷ Instead of « the historical moment : very critical : Fifth century » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁷⁸ Instead of « oneself » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁷⁹ Instead of “referred”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁰ Instead of “hierarchical” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸¹ Instead of « borrowed » (the verb is indicative in the original text) (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸² Instead of « were » (the verb is indicative in the original text) (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

lay apostolic action begin. It is also the moment of the missionary thrust to the uttermost⁸³ ends of the earth; it is the Church which came down to us, until Vatican II.

The risks? Those of a certain violence, impatience, intolerance; the distance between the Church and the new world which was born and developed outside of her widened and deepened in the absence of a real dialogue.

THE CHURCH TODAY

At the Second Vatican Council, the Church became vividly conscious of her nature and mission in today's world. Her deficiencies and even her defects were brought out into the light of day; the desire was to return to the Gospel, to the early sources of the Church in order to rediscover her force, her vitality, the "salt and light" necessary for a provocative presence in the world. The ordinary images are emphatically emphasized: the People of God reveals to us in a new way the idea of "communion" as the core of the christian community. The image, *Body of Christ*, brings out the dimension of service, the ministerial structure of the Church. That of the Temple of God makes the Church the witness and the site of the joyful proclamation that in Christ, the world and humanity are definitively penetrated by God. Such is the task which the Church has before her: to be a Community of brotherhood and solidarity; servant at every level, she must live entirely for others, witness of God's immanence⁸⁴ in the world in Jesus Christ, the Church must make her message believable by her joy and hope.

The Second Vatican Council shook many things in the Church, of that we are fully conscious. Many of the decisions taken there were welcomed with joy by many, but stirred up suspicion and regret amongst others. But above and beyond the printed texts or declarations, one thing is certain: the Church is changing, by small and larger steps. Shaken out of her immobility, she tries to live in faithfulness to her Lord, today, in this new age. She has passed from the city, the citadel, to the People of God and the grass-roots communities which are springing up all over. In this same thrust, the Church is becoming somewhat less centralised, and the local Churches assume their well differentiated⁸⁵ expressions. There is another passage, from a clerical, hierarchical Church, to a Church where the responsibilities are shared, where everyone, the Pope included, has his place and his part. Finally, the passage from a powerful Church to a Church without defence,⁸⁶ vulnerable, not afraid to affirm her true wealth and strength – the Christ who chose her as His bride, the Spirit who encourages and assists her, the Father who lavishes his love upon her, man, in whom she believes.

Vatican II opened the dikes, and the waters poured forth in every direction; producing a certain confusion. In the past fifteen years, many experiments have been attempted, certain successful, others failures, the time necessary for the crossing in order to reach the other shore, there where the waters are once again calm and can be channelled in order to make the best use of their force. The Church of the Second Vatican Council does not start from scratch; she seeks to be renewed, but based on heritage of the previous generations; the proximity and commitment of the "cosmic" Church; the community sense of the "City of God", the firm unity and the efficacy⁸⁷ of the hierarchical Church with the consciousness of the bonds which attached her to Christ; the youth and the capacity to dream of the

⁸³ Instead of « utermost » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁴ Instead of « immenence » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁵ Instead of « differenciated » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁶ Instead of « defense » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁷ Instead of « efficacy » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

“militant” Church. The Church lives in the present moment, but is oriented towards the future, with all the riches of a long history which becomes – with its fidelity and its faults, the history of salvation for all mankind

CONCLUSION

Before the mystery of the Church, before the concrete image that the contemporary Church presents to the world, do we know how to recognise the bonds which attach us to her? What is our faith, our commitment? How do we live her fundamental paradox, that of being holy and sinful at the same time? What is the sense of our obedience to the Church, which is concretised by our acceptance of her authority and her teaching?⁸⁸ How to continue to be “rich with her spirit” as Marie Eugenie desired?⁸⁹

These questions are open to our reflection and our prayer.

⁸⁸ Instead of « . » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁸⁹ Instead of « . » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 17, 1980

ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER ON “THE NATURAL VIRTUES”

26th May, 1878

S. Clare Teresa

I. WHAT DID MARIE EUGENIE SAY?

- A. - When he created man, God endowed him with a natural rectitude. It was sin which destroyed this integrity.
- Man’s task is to redress the distortion of his nature.
 - Because the glory of God requires it.
 - We, of the Assumption, ought to be particularly⁹⁰ concerned to cultivate the natural virtues, in ourselves and in others,
 - for the sake of “Laus Deo”
 - for the sake of our apostolate.
- B. - The natural virtues are “not yet on a level, with Christian virtue”
- but they are a necessary foundation for it.
- C. - A life of piety does not necessarily strengthen the natural virtues.
- On the other hand sinners often have these virtues. There may be an occasion for scandal here: “a painful contrast which does not contribute to the glory of Our Lord and his Church”, and does not lead to the conversion of sinners.
 - Not to pay particular attention to cultivating the natural virtues, is not a serious sin, but it is to neglect a certain nobility of character and to neglect something which honours God.
 - At the Assumption, we should make the effort to develop our best and noblest human characteristics, to correct what is base, to learn to be kind, generous and trustworthy.⁹¹

II. WHAT LED MARIE EUGENIE TO WRITE IN THIS WAY?

- A. - She believed that human nature is fundamentally good.
- She could not imagine a genuine holiness which failed to correct the distortions of sin.
 - She saw that man in the integrity of his true nature is the glory of God – he is made in God’s image.
 - She knew that restoring the natural virtues is hard work, and calls for

⁹⁰ Instead of « particular » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁹¹ Instead of « trustworthy » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

sustained effort.

- B. - In the theology of the period, nature and grace were seen as two independent objects.
 - Marie Eugénie knew from her own experience that anyone who was Making an honest effort to live rightly, by the light of conscience, was open to grace.
- C. - The whole of this section presented difficulties for Marie Eugénie. The Contemporary theology of nature and grace, and of salvation was inadequate.
 - She could not see that the action of grace of the achievement of holiness could occur independently of human effort and experience.
 - She was distressed by the counter-witness of the “pious”.
 - Particularly in contrast to the virtues of non-believers.
 - Is it a sin to make no effort to become a better person?
 - Haven’t we a duty to do more than preserve an “adequate” degree of purity? ⁹²(righteousness)

III. WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURAL VIEW?

A. The image of God.

- Gen. 1, 26-27 “God said: ‘Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves...’ God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him...”
- 31 “God saw all that he made, and indeed it was very good.”
- 1 Co 11, 7 “A man ... is the image of God and reflects God’s glory...”
- Rm. 8, 29 “They are the ones he chose especially⁹³ long ago, and predestined to become true images of his Son...”
- 2 Co 3, 18 “ And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.”

- B. Salvation. The moral life of believers is based on Baptism.

⁹² Instead of « purity » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁹³ Instead of « specially » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- 2 Co 5, 17 “ And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation.”
- Col. 3, 9 “ ...And never tell each other lies. You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its creator; ...Christ, he is everything and he is in everything.”
- Col. 1,12-22 “ Christ, the Image of the unseen God, the First-Born of all creation, in whom and by whom we have be reconciled.”

C. The Christian virtues. The demands of Christian life and the Gifts of the Spirit.

References: Gal 5,22; Eph 5,8-9; 2 Co 6, 4-7; and seq. ; Ph 4, 8-9

Note from the “Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible” on the word “virtue”, in the above passage from Ph 4: ‘This is the only instance in all Paul’s epistles of a word much in use among the Greek moralists. The six characteristics listed indicate respect for the sound and praise-worthy values of the pagan moral ideal. But verse 9 shows that, for Christians, they are to be realised within the context of a tradition, following the example of Paul, who lives in Christ.’ (3,17)

IV - NATURE AND GRACE- SOME THEOLOGICAL NOTES.

In the 19th century, influenced by a philosophy that described reality in terms of “essence” and “nature”, there was a tendency to suppose that “nature” could have an independent existence as an “entity” (separately existing thing). “Nature” could be thought of without reference to “existence”, to living and becoming. Grace, the spiritual side of things, was thought of as another entity which could exist alongside nature, as though they were two distinct layers.

Consequently, it was easy to imagine that life too was divisible into two separate areas, sacred and profane, natural and supernatural. Whatever originated in nature of was natural, was regarded with suspicion and there was an attempt to live “the life of grace” as something “supernatural” or almost angelic.

Nowadays we think of nature and grace, natural and supernatural, as separate concepts indicating facets or aspects of a single reality, - human life and experience.

At the practical level they are not two separate areas, or distinct systems, but different dimensions of a single reality, nature transformed by grace, or graced. They are not to be thought of as fused into a single thing, since grace transcends nature, rather as the meaning of a gift is more than the thing which is given, without being separate from it.

Along this same line, the natural virtues do not have an existence for themselves so that we might be able to add to them a supernatural virtue. In time, neither do we first acquire a natural virtue and then pass on to a supernatural virtue.

The expression “natural virtues, basis for supernatural virtues”, or “this is not yet grace” or “this is not yet Christian virtue”, may, for the Christian (the religious of the Assumption) lead to ambiguous ideas: that supernatural life can be lived without natural life, or that the Christian has two separate lives: one natural and the other supernatural. – Now the Christian is a person who has only one existence. Nature (culture) and grace are different dimensions of that existence.

It is also helpful to remember that virtues do not exist either, as things or entities in themselves. Straightforwardness as such, does not exist; there are only straightforward men – the straightforward unbeliever or the straightforward believer.

- REDEMPTION. The moral life of a Christian is founded on the grace of Baptism.

The Gift of God- Salvation – By Baptism, the Christian “receives ‘the first-fruits of the Spirit’ which enable him to keep the New Law of Love.” (G.S.22) Christian morality is thus lived as an answer to the initiative of God. The Christian is invited to act properly as to correspond, in thanksgiving, to what God has done for him. (Ph.2,1-6 and 2 Cor. 8,9)

Baptism is a participation in divine life for sinful humanity. Christian activity flows from a new being. The believer has God’s life in him in such a manner that his mortal life is not just an answer to love, but is born of the gift of the Spirit. It is the fruit of a new life (Gal. 5). Good works are the fruit of the Gift of God.

It is love which allows man to unite in one single “energy” the grace of God and his freedom (nature). “You will love the Lord your God... You will love your neighbour as yourself” is the summary of Christian morality. (Mk 12, 29-33) Love fulfills the Law-nature. Man’s effort is necessary, the commitment of all his liberty. But his effort is taken up in the current of grace. Ultimately, it is an effort to surrender⁹⁴, of allowing oneself to become what one already is. (Ph. 2,12-13)

However, the Gospel does not forge an esoteric ideal, but meets the deepest and most universal that there is in man (nature). The acknowledgment by man of the value of goodness and of the desire that there is in him to make a success of his life and experience happiness. The Gospel reveals the full meaning of this desire and of human life. (Rm. 2,12-16)

It takes on the authentic values (the natural virtues) and gives them their full dimension.

- JESUS CHRIST. But it is starting from Jesus Christ that the authors of the New Testament meet man. There is a close connection between the revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ crucified and the exhortation to Christian living (between dogma of faith and morality). Christ, the perfect Man, manifested man fully to himself, revealing to him the sublimity of his vocation and opening out to him a new route. (G.S.22)

In Him – the Word of Life Who was made man within a people is found the harmony

⁹⁴ Instead of « at surrender » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

and the perfection of nature (culture) and of grace. The Christian acts in Christ, by Christ, like Christ, for Christ. He must become more and more human in the likeness of Christ. We must reject all impossible “angelism” and seek the integration of our body and our spirit, of nature and grace. Nature and grace must support each other mutually, complete each other, interpenetrate each other. The natural virtues develop the moral character of the person and are a necessary defence⁹⁵ against the evil inclinations of the flesh and the domination of instinct. The theological virtues purify, deepen, transform and bring to fulfilment⁹⁶ the authentic human values (natural). But without the human realities “it is greatly to be feared that they themselves (the theological virtues) should be impoverished, narrowed down and falsified.” (de Lubac)

- SINNERS- THE NON-BELIEVERS We can easily understand that the Christian should be scandalised that Christians (religious) should not be straightforward, as good, as non-Christians, as sinners. (In Rm.2, St Paul notes that there are pagans who are better than the Jews).

We must not think that God’s grace is only found in believers – that non-believers are deprived of grace. GAUDIUM ET SPES as well as LUMEN GENTIUM proclaim clearly the Will of God to save all men:

“Because He took on human nature without ceasing to be God, humanity has been raised to a new and unequalled⁹⁷ dignity. For, through His Incarnation, the Son of God united Himself, as it were, to every man...”

“And this is true, not only for those who believe in Christ, but for all men of good will, in whose hearts grace is invisibly at work...The Holy Spirit, in a way known only to God, makes it possible for every man to share in the paschal mystery.” (G.S. 22)

“Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who, through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His Will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace.” (L.G. 16)

V. A RE-EXAMINATION OF MARIE EUGENIE’S CHAPTER (what is valid for our charism today).

A- The restoration of God’s image in us.

- M.M. Eugénie emphasises the importance of human effort.
- God saves man through a free gift, but not without his co-operation.
- God takes his creature seriously and respects his liberty: man created in the image of God, and created anew in the Son, is like God in the possession of freedom. He is able to respond to God, and to assume responsibility for his life.
- Our efforts to behave morally show the dignity of man, and glorify God.
- We should struggle with our sinfulness, with our tendencies to be selfish, spiteful etc..., tendencies which result from sin.

⁹⁵ Instead of « defense » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁹⁶ Instead of « fulfillment » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁹⁷ Instead of « unqualified » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- We can be transformed by grace if we co-operate.
 - This position springs from a very positive attitude to human nature and human destiny, it is neither quietist⁹⁸ nor jansenist⁹⁹.
- B. Our lives as human beings commit us to a struggle (the spiritual combat)
- M.M.Eugénie emphasises the formation of character, our own and that of those we educate.
 - Development in straightforwardness, simplicity, generosity, kindness, etc. transforms the individual in the image of the God-MAN and makes him open to the Spirit, to the Law of Love.
 - A person whose piety is entirely “mystical”, who has a “life of piety” or takes refuge in “adequate purity” is not taking herself (or himself) seriously as a whole woman or man¹⁰⁰.
 - Marie Eugénie felt that people like this were either morally feeble, or Pharisees, relying on a legalistic conformity to some external standard – rules or pious practices – rather than toiling to transform themselves in accordance with the justice of God.
- C. Marie Eugénie lists as “natural virtues qualities admired in the culture of 19th century Europe - a culture shaped by the Christian tradition.
- These virtues might be known, loved and practised without reference to the Gospel, to Christ, or to the Church.
 - The seed of the Gospel is sown in soil prepared by the development in human life and society of values compatible with Gospel values.
 - When Paul set out to give the Philippians a detailed account of what is demanded of Christians trying to live by the Gospel, he turned to what is best and truest in the stoic philosophic tradition, as to something that they knew and understood.
 - To preach the Gospel without taking into account the already existing moral standards characteristic of the culture, is to risk superficiality and irrelevance. The Gospel must encounter man at the level of whatever he sees as his most deeply serious concerns.
 - As a plant needs pulp to grow, so grace¹⁰¹ needs the human.
 - The witness can make himself understood only when he appeals to man in his concrete existence.

APPENDIX: A LETTER FROM FR D'ALZON TO M.M.EUGENIE (16th March, 1884)
which sums up what is best in the “natural virtues” approach to spirituality.

“... You are an inexplicable creature at times, or rather you are someone who displays in the most startling way all three of the elements which go to make up a human being and a Christian.

- A rather attractive natural temperament, frank, honest, and outgoing,
- The most frightful ravages of original sin, all the towering pride that cast Satan into the depth of hell, he who must have said for sure: “Why should I care?” - and who, as he wallows there sizzling, doubtless exclaims at intervals: “What the use?”

⁹⁸ Instead of « quietistic” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

⁹⁹ Instead of « jansenistic” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰⁰ Contrary at the order of the English translation : “ is not taking herself (or himself) as a whole man or woman” (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰¹ Instead of « Grace » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- A good, simple lass , washed in the blood of Christ, who loves her as only God knows how, and whom, for her part, she would like to love and to make loved.
The thing for you, my girl, is to cultivate the third element, by destroying the second, and making the best use you can of the first. . .”

SOME QUOTATIONS

**This page has been omitted .
(page 193 of the French document)**

July 17, 1980

THE VIRGIN MARY

Sr Fermina

Note: This English translation is an outline of the longer French Conference.

English Document: pages 169-176 // French Document: pages 195-211

« It is always very consoling to speak of the Virgin Mary¹⁰² » (Marie-Eugénie)

- I. Mary in Marie Eugénie's life.
- II. What M.M.E. thought of her place in our lives ought to be.
 - a. We should thank God for creating her.
 - b. Refer to her as we meditate on the mysteries of our Lord, so as to know¹⁰³ and love better Jesus Christ.
 - c. Love her as the mother Jesus gave us
 - d. Imitate her holiness
 - e. Pray confidently for her help in working for the kingdom and in loving Jesus Christ.

M. Marie Eugénie did not fall into the errors against which Vatican II has warned us – see Lumen Gentium 67 and Marialis Cultus 38.

She would have rejoiced to see her hailed as mother of the Church.

Though to some extent influenced by her period, Marie Eugénie recognised that devotion to the Virgin must essentially tend to the glory of God. (MC 26)

For Marie Eugénie (CP MC 37) Mary is not a possessive mother, she gives her Son to the world, and herself and us to Him. (MC 25).

Marie Eugénie was able to select the soundest elements from the theology and devotions of her period (Ch. 12.5.78), we must select from what is valid today.

E.G. Marie Eugénie's chapter 14.11.75, where she refers to an 18th century devotion – thinking of oneself as the SLAVE our Lady- and explains that it is better and more orthodox to be her child.

I. MARY IN MME'S LIFE.

At the time of her meeting with the Abbé Combalot in 1837, he asked: "Have you a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin?" – "Not as much as I would like" (Or I p. 65) she replied.

¹⁰² Instead of adding « ! » at the end of the sentence (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰³ The end of the sentence « and love better Jesus Christ" is omitted. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Quotations from L. 6.8.38 and Notes Intimes show Marie Eugénie meditating on Mary's love of her Son (at Bethleem and Nazareth) who is the joy of the elect and our joy in communion.

To Fr d'Alzon (5.6.1842) she complained of feelings of rebellion, doubts of the existence of God, and desolation in her lack of love for his Mother... "I keep thinking of what the Fathers of the Church say about a lack of devotion to Mary being a mark of God's disfavour, I never had much, and now I have none, and what is worse, I cannot communicate any to the others, whilst I can at least always talk convincingly of our Lord."

Three months later (L. 16.9.42)¹⁰⁴ she was sustained in her resolution of complete obedience by the thought of Mary's fidelity in avoiding any less perfect choice.

Christmas 1843 – in a period of dryness she was consoled by the sense that she had been given Mary as protector: "I felt that the ordinariness of her life, her eagerness to be merciful, the kind of rejection she suffered from some of her Son's words in the Gospel, made her a patron suitable to my wretchedness and the state I am in... You know how far from my mind devotion to our Lady has been, it was a joy to feel it revive when I least expected it." She offered Jesus his mother's prayer and virtues, and said 20 rosaries that day. (L.3.1.43)

In 1843 she made a pilgrimage to Betharram in the Pyrenees, and came back with increased devotion, and a wish to share it with the sisters. (L.9.11.43 and 18.12.43)

At the same period (L.18.12.43) she welcomed Fr. d'Alzon's reflection that: "Like Mary, our order is destined to bring to birth our Saviour's mystical body;... a permanent Incarnation."

From this time her devotion to Mary continued to grow.

1851-1856: she felt increased devotion during May, and joy in it; the thought of Mary – the mother of the Congregation, as St. Teresa was for the Carmelites, sustained Marie Eugénie in her responsibilities and brought her peace.

Notes Intimes: 1851- the name of Mary distills¹⁰⁵ purity, love, generous integrity (droiture) and all that is pleasant to the soul.

1854: renewed devotion to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament.

26.9.56: retreat, she relies on Mary to help her love Jesus.

January 1877: a retreat spent meditating on Mary's part in the life of Jesus. In outline:

At the Incarnation – (the holy house at Loretto had been too acute the humility of Mary and the self- obliteration of Jesus made her ask for the grace of accepting one's limitations, praying humbly at the door. She should accept her deserts as a sinner, not¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Instead of « 1832 » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰⁵ Instead of « distills » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰⁶ Instead of « mot » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

eager for what is pleasant, reluctant to accept humiliations and rejects¹⁰⁷.

In the journey of Bethlehem – Mary travelled from poverty to destitution, rejection. Marie Eugénie desired to take a servant's place “in our houses”, “peacefully carrying Jesus”, through sufferings, opposition, crisis, and underhand behaviour when it comes, - to overcome her pride, impatience etc, and serve all without exception humbly and lovingly.

At Bethlehem, Mary was rejected, at the birth of Jesus- circumcision- the Presentation, she met with poverty, contempt and suffering; in Mary and Joseph, prayer and love are united. Jesus is to be found only on this company.

The flight into Egypt – we learn it in providence, accepting to circumstances which make prayer more difficult, to avoiding “if only...”

The loss of Jesus in the temple was one of Mary's great sorrows. Seeing Christ teach the Doctors, she prays for enlightenment, “My Father's business.” For Marie Eugénie this meant the Office and giving spiritual direction.

In the life at Nazareth, she saw the silence of the Word, the self-emptying of the all-powerful, work, obedience, prayer. “Nazareth pays God all the homage that is his due...” Jesus works for the salvation of men, but first of all in adoration of his Father, this is the action in the tabernacle. The kindness of Nazareth.

The public ministry – where was Mary? Alone at Nazareth or with the holy women? Her submission, perfection, poverty.

“I ask our Lord for a large share of our Lady's compassion.”

The 1880 retreat recapitulates the same themes. The bride of Christ should imitate his Mother.

15.11.1880: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is to be treated with love and respect learnt from Mary. In the upper room at Pentecost, already filled with the Holy Spirit, she received Him once more. “Ask for a new outpouring for myself.”

II. What M.M.E. thought be in our lives.

a. Mary as God's greatest work

Ch. 8.7.76: “Devotion to Mary is an essential devotion; distinct ... from every other, since she is the most perfect of creatures and she is associated with...all the God-man did on earth. She is our Lord's mother...channel of grace...whenever you think of our Lord, you find her beside Him.”

¹⁰⁷ Instead of « to accept cheks »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Ch. 29.9.76: "...you can do no better¹⁰⁸, on Mary's feast days than to bless God for having made her...good, gentle, holy, so full of grace, all the beauties of creation are summed up in her. Theologians tell us that it is not enough to admire the work of grace in her. We must admire the marvels of God's creation... at the natural level..." Of all the works of God the greatest is the Incarnation... the complete expression of the power of God...the creation of the Virgin Mother¹⁰⁹ is also beyond our understanding, and speaks to us of the infinity of God...we should bless, glorify, and thank God for her...always seeing things from God's point of view first of all."

Ch. 21.11.72: "Her knowledge of God was the most perfect ever reached on earth."

Ch. 10.10.80: "When I talk to you of our Lord and our Lady, it is so that you may love them more... (Eccl. 24, 31)... Remember our Lady is always united to our Lord and you must never separate them. She is, as it were, the tenderness of God through which He came to us, holiness that He created, purity without stain, queen of goodness and mercy in whose arms it pleased Him to rest. Can you imagine the Eternal Word coming to us without...that admirable virgin...? We almost say that He could not have come..."

M.Marie Eugénie draws our attention to Mary's responsiveness to grace:

Ch.27.5.88: "I am convinced that even the greatest of the saints failed to give God all He asked of them...in the Virgin Mary alone...every grace bore fruit a hundred-fold... starting from her Immaculate¹¹⁰ Conception she came to her Assumption by the stepping stones of her divine motherhood, and at the foot of the cross where she became the mother of men."

Ch. 9.5.84:"For Mary as for us, all holiness comes from GOD."

Mary in the economy of Salvation:

Ch. 15.12.78: "The purpose of the Incarnation is to make saints...He came...to the Virgin Mary because she was entirely holy...so as to bring us holiness."

We rejoice because of the Assumption, human flesh and blood attaining the state of Glory.

Ch. 19.5.78: "...joyful detachment from the things of earth...rising triumphant over sorrows and difficulties... we are called to do this by...our union with the Virgin Mary rising...calling us to rise with her to a heavenly life and set our earths and minds on heavenly things."

Ch. 9.12.81: " TO KNOW JESUS IN HIS MOTHER¹¹¹ is to know Him perfectly."

¹⁰⁸ Instead of "beter" (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁰⁹ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁰ Instead of « imaculate » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹¹ Instead of « To know Jesus in his mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Marie Eugénie encouraged devotion to the ‘Gospel saints’ because of their intimate acquaintance with Jesus, and “we who are educating the present generation of disciples...” should be specially close to Mary. She is immersed in the divine and human aspects of the redemption, and so close to the whole life of man. (cf. Redemptor Hominis)

b. Mary and the mysteries of our Lord.

Ch. 8.7.76: “Mary is associated with all the mysteries of Christ. The crib- the adoration of the Magi- the child Jesus in her arms – at the foot of the cross- in heaven interceding for us...at Pentecost, the birth of the Church, the Ascension which teaches us to look towards heaven...”

Ch. 8.7.76: “Mary is always beside Jesus.”

Ch. 14.11.75: “ Mary co-operates in our salvation.”

Ch.12.12.84: “...her obedience. Jesus said of her ‘Blessed are those who hear...’”

Ch. 14.11.78 (the Visitation): “With the difficulties of the journey, it was an apostolic mission, taking Jesus to Elisabeth. In Mary’s self-effacement during Jesus’ public life participation in her heart and her prayers in His teaching, we can learn from her apostolic spirit.

Ch. 2.7.76: “Her internal recollection was an expression of the divine presence. At the Visitation, she brought the Holy Spirit to Elisabeth, through what she was.

The Wedding Feast at Cana – there are three chapters on this :

Ch. 27.1.89: It shows Mary’s compassion, foreshadows¹¹² the Eucharist. “We lack the wine of love – ‘Do whatever He tells you’ (poverty, humility, obedience, prayer)”

Ch. 8.4.82: Mary’s tears associated with the blood of Christ.

c. She is the Mother¹¹³ Jesus gave us.

(Cp. Marialis Cultus, 22- the spiritual maternity.

Ch. 8.4.81: Her sufferings at the foot of the cross made her our Mother¹¹⁴. “From that moment you were all taken into her heart.”

Ch. 8.4.81: “...He knew He was giving His mother sons who were not worthy of her.”

Ch. 14.11.75: “A Mother¹¹⁵ whose feelings should be reflected in her children.”

¹¹² Instead of « foreshadows » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹³ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁴ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁵ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Ch. 7.9.86: There is consolation in following Mary, our Mother.¹¹⁶

Ch. 27.1.89 (see above – Cana)

Mary was Mother of God through her acceptance of the Word, the Mother¹¹⁷ of men through her acceptance at the foot of the cross, Mother¹¹⁸ of the Church at Pentecost.

Ch. 26.8.77: “After opening her heart to God, she opened it to all mankind.”

Ch. 14.10.77: Mary is Mother¹¹⁹ of God and our Mother¹²⁰. This is an elementary truth and the essential of spiritual life is to be thoroughly at home with the basics of faith. We should be continually full of Mary, through love or trust, or our likeness to her.

d. Imitating her holiness

Ch.24.9.76: “Since we delight in her virtues, we should try to imitate her, so that in appropriate circumstances we shall respond with submission, humility, faith...and especially a silence like hers.”

Ch. 21.11.72: On imitating Mary in the details of life.

Today, when we have so many decisions to take, we should contemplate Mary in her “active and free consent” (L.G.) to the “central event of history”, the Incarnation.

Accepting God’s will, she was not pallidly submissive, but proclaimed God’s vindication of the humble.

She knew poverty, suffering and exile; when in the spirit of the Gospels, Christians work for the establishment of peace and justice, they can draw strength from her. (Lumen Gentium 55)

Mary is the model for a disciple, working for the kingdom on earth, a pilgrim hastening to the heavenly city; she stands for justice for the oppressed and help for the needy, but above all she is a witness to the love which builds us into the likeness of Christ. (M.C. 37 and R.V. (5,12,21,22,23,25,30,37,63,83,etc.)

A model in the details of our daily life, she is a mirror reflecting the hopes of our times.

Ch. 25.10.74: Mary is a human like us, fitted to be our model.

Ch. 26.8.77: A model for us – through her holiness, “a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed” set apart from all that is unclean, all that is imperfect¹²¹, all that is not God. This is the aim of our Rule.

¹¹⁶ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁷ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁸ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹¹⁹ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁰ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²¹ Instead of « all that is imperfect, all that is imperfect »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Ch. 16.5.84: “ Her pure love is to be imitated...called by the saints “the Mother of Fair Love”¹²²- she gives to others a capacity for pure love...utterly generous and self-sacrificing ...in the saints nothing comes between God and the soul...we must try to attain this in imitation of Mary, and reach peace and union with Christ.

Ch.16.4.86: Mary loved our Lord and thought of him continuously. All our problems would be solved if we thought of Him rather than ourselves. We enter religion in order to love God; to do this, and to imitate Mary, we must renounce ourselves. (Mt 16, 24)

Ch.16.5.84: Mary’s humility- she took no credit for the “fullness¹²³ of grace. But you¹²⁴? Have you¹²⁵ no desire to shine in our own eyes or those of others? ¹²⁶This should be totally foreign to a daughter of Mary, who should also imitate her in submission, the other aspect of humility.

Ch.16.5.84: (see the extract on the Assumption in “Les Droits de Dieu”). .. She acknowledges all she has received, offers it back to God, obliterates herself before Him and adores Him throughout eternity... she moulds her daughters so that they become other worshippers following in her footsteps.

Ch. 9.5.84: Mary’s life of constant prayer.

Ch. 24.3.82: Prayer, silence, humility, union with God... imitate her!

Ch.19.8.81: Mary’s union with God...The lower part of our soul may be taken up with suffering, difficulties, troubles, depression. Our Lord accepted depression: “He began to be sorrowful and to be heavy and sad” the Gospel says of his agony...but in the “higher part” of our soul we must be united with God...This is what we must work at. The Virgin Mary had an immense desire to see God. It was that which caused her death, her Assumption... the more she desired Him the better she knew Him... There are conclusions to be drawn from all this, firstly a great desire...to know and love God.

Mary, hearing the Word of God and welcoming it in faith, became the Mother of God. “Blessed is she who believed...” In faith she reflected on the events of the infancy of Christ, keeping them in her heart. In this she is followed by the Church, which, especially through the liturgy, hears, announces and honours the Word of God, transmits it to the Faithful as the Bread of Life (Dei Verbum 21) and searches the signs of the times by its light.

Ch.16.6.82: Mary’s constant faith from the birth of our Lord to Calvary, her submission in hope and love.

¹²² Instead of « the mother of fair love »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²³ Instead of « fulness » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁴ Instead of « we »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁵ Instead of « we »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁶ Instead of “,”(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Ch. 26.8.77: Mary is closest to her son through her obedience to the will of God. (Mt 12,50)

Or. IV p.400: Mary as an example of attentiveness to the Word of God and the teaching of the Church.

Ch. 8.1.81: The words of our Lord on the cross “pierced our Lady’s heart with love and compassion.”

Ch.9.5.84: Imitate Mary in her sense of the continual presence of God in her.

Ch. 10.12.76: “Why do I feel that straightforwardness should be our main characteristic? First of all because of the mystery of the Assumption. when Mary left earth behind, she was so single-mindedly tending towards God that she was carried directly to the Father.”

Ch.10.3.82: “St Ambrose tells us that Mary was filled with strength in her way of answering the Angel, in time of trial when...Joseph intended to send her away,...in the flight into Egypt...and above all at the foot of the cross...”

Ch. 5.1.83: Mary’s joy in great poverty came from her love of Jesus.

Ch. 17.10.86: “Mary was always a garden enclosed, whose fruits were for the Lord alone...chosen ground... A sealed fountain whose waters sprang upwards to heaven. She is the type of a religious soul, through love and purity. On the day we are professed our Lord seals us for his own...this consecration helps us to imitate Mary.”

Ch. 7.10.81: “Our Lady was no more exempt from the difficulties of life than we are, and yet what peace, what patience she exercised¹²⁷ until her death, since she waited for years in longing to see God and her divine Son, Jesus!”

Ch. 17.9.86: “Mary is also a model for our activities. In the Temple and at Nazareth she worked hard...later after the Ascension she worked for the new-born Church, she devoted herself completely to it because this is what obedience required of her...in complete self-forgetfulness.”

Ch. 9.5.84: “If we belong to our Lord, it is with Mary, through Mary and as Mary’s¹²⁸ daughters...we must always try to imitate her in her total gift of herself to Jesus.

Ch. 7.4.72: “The more we try to know God, the more we shall love Him. This is the activity of the citizens of Heaven, it was Mary’s throughout her life; she was absorbed by the mysteries of her son.

How inspiring it is to see in Mary the purified reflection of all we hope to become as members of the Church whose Mother¹²⁹ she is!”

e. Praying for her help.

¹²⁷ Instead of « excerised » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁸ Instead of « Mary ‘ daughters ». (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹²⁹ Instead of « mother » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

Ch. 17.10.80: “In order to work for the sanctification of others, we must, like our Lady preach for example, and start by making ourselves holy in every respect.”

Ch.21.11.72: “In addition to imitating her, we must pray for her help – ‘omnipotentia supplex’ - with great confidence, continually.”

Ch. 9.5.84: “Through Mary’s help and example we learn to serve Christ well and become true daughters of the Assumption, unstinting in our generosity¹³⁰ to Christ and genuinely devoted to our Lady.”

Ch. 24.9.76: “We do not trust our Lady enough. If we always called on her in temptation...turning to her as our Mother, we should less often feel bruised and exhausted, since we would have the support of her motherly heart.”

Ch. 14.11.75: “One of the most effective ways of learning to love God as we should in the religious life, is to offer ourselves to our Lady, asking for a part in her attitudes... When you do not know how to pray, meditate or love God, ... you will always find what you lack in Mary...faith, adoration, consent to His will, imitation, recollection... everything...”

Ch. 7.6.86: “The retreat in the Upper Room where Mary, with the Apostles and holy women, prayed ardently and perseveringly for the coming fullness of the Holy Spirit...she obtained the grace of detachment from earthly things for the apostles...”

21.11.72: Feasts of the Church...especially of the Blessed Virgin teach and console us. Our Mother, mediatrix and support¹³¹, she leads us to become all God asks of us...”

29.8.81: “Mary is all-powerful in supplication. We do not ask her to pity us, but to pray for us. She cares¹³² for us and delights in our prayers.”

Ch. 5.8.83: “With Mary for our Mother, we cannot fail to be confident. Always ready to help us, she has never abandoned a sinner... who puts his trust in her.”

L. 1843: “We are called to honour the Incarnation, the Person of our Lord and Mary’s faithful love of Jesus is what determines our outlook on education... Mary seems to us to be truly our Mother as being the human most fully immersed in Christ.”

Ch. 14.12.73: “As religious of the Assumption, we must be most particularly attached to the life of Christ and, following His example, rise above the things of earth and surmount all difficulties with a SURSUM CORDA!”

¹³⁰ Instead of « generosity » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³¹ Marie Eugénie wrote these words « mediatrix and supply » in latin : « Omnipotentia supplex »(Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³² Instead of « care » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

July 18, 1980

ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER ON JOYFUL DETACHMENT

Sr Clare Teresa

I. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS:

- The Spirit of the Assumption leads to a joyful detachment from all things
- The Blessed Virgin calls us to rise with her towards a heavenly life.
 - o Placing our thoughts and affections in heaven
 - o Ever raising our minds to God, being occupied with God, seeking God
 - o Leaving behind us all things that are low¹³³, small¹³⁴, inferior¹³⁵
 - o Rising above all difficulties and sorrows
 - o Without stopping at complaints¹³⁶
- Everything leads us towards an attitude of joyful detachment
 - o We choose those doctrines which give the most glory to God
 - o God is our Father, infinite goodness, mercy and wisdom
 - o We adore God and place all our confidence in Him
 - o We love his will, we receive it with joy and confidence, we adore God's Will
- We have such important things to think about and to seek:
 - o Love of the Truth, love for the Church, love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, love for the Blessed Virgin, souls, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ
 - o It's not worth wasting time over things of this earth or in lamenting
 - o We should use our time to fill ourselves with divine truth and love, to serve our Lord and work for Him.
- God has given man intelligence and freedom (liberty). He wants him to use these gifts.
 - o He does not want us to be passive in face of difficulties, hardships, and sorrows.
 - o We have to seek how to make the best of every situation, seeking how God wants us to do this.
 - o We should use the means he has given us in order to serve Him better and give Him glory.
 - o Everything works unto good for those who love God – even sin

¹³³ Instead of "base" which means the foundation, the lowest part of something. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³⁴ Instead of the english translation : « mesquine » which does not seem to exist. "Mesquin" in French would have been translated by "petty". (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³⁵ Instead of « that are inferior, mesquine, base » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³⁶ Instead of « Without stopping to complain ! », which seems to be a misinterpretation. (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- If we see things in this light we come through all situations with joyful detachment, strength, confidence, liberty of spirit, simplicity and straightforwardness. Nothing can stop or hinder us.
- One of the great evils of our times is being preoccupied with self
 - o Before the Fall (sin) man saw God in all things and all things in God.
 - o Sin has troubled man's vision so that he is inclined to stop at the lower things and at himself¹³⁷
 - o It is not normal for an intelligent being to be happy turning in a stupid circle of banalities.
- We should protest. Our life should be a protest against a useless life in which God, our true goal, is forgotten.
- What keeps us from animating all our thoughts, our words and our works with zeal?
 - o It is freeing for us and helps us to give ourselves to all that concerns the service of our Father.
 - o In the degree that we are free from useless thoughts, complaints and lamentations, free from the affairs of the world, we procure the Kingdom of God and also fill ourselves with worthwhile things.
We speak more often to God and of God ¹³⁸

The result is joy!

NOTES:

- 1- It is worth noting the ecstatic character of Marie Eugénie's vocabulary. All goes in the direction of transcending self, going out of self to go towards God.
Eg. Raise oneself, rise above, without stopping or being hindered, "go before God's will"
This type of vocabulary is constant in Marie Eugénie's writings: leave what is human, earthly, natural, passing, purely personal (egoistical) in order to arrive at what is heavenly, spiritual, divine, eternal.
- 2- We should translate the opposition frequently found in Mother Foundress between human and spiritual in the light of St. Paul's opposition between the flesh and the Spirit.
- 3- Underlying the opposition between God and self (selfish egoism) we find the two cities of St. Augustine.

II-THE FUNDAMENTAL INTUITION expressed by M. Marie Eugénie

In this chapter on Joyful Detachment Mother Marie Eugénie expresses the fundamental radicalism of the religious life.

¹³⁷ Instead of « taken up by base things and his own egoism. »? (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹³⁸ Instead of « of God and to God » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

- Life for us as Religious of the Assumption is absolute openness to God who is the all of our lives
 - o Human existence is lived before God; that is, in constant reference to Him
 - o Our life is rooted in God and can find its fulfilment in God alone*.

**Evangelica Testificatio N°3- Religious live is “a constant seeking for God...” N°8: “An irresistible attraction draws you to the Lord.*

Perfectae Caritatis N°5- “The members of each institute “seek God before all things and only Him...”

- Our life is absolute openness to God on account of what He is.
 - o We choose the doctrines¹³⁹ which make Him more lovable and which honour Him most
 - o God is our Father: infinite goodness, wisdom and mercy
 - o Because He is infinitely loving and lovable, we adore Him and trust Him
 - o His Will can only be good, so we love it and receive it with joy and confidence ; we adore it.

- Our life “before God” manifests itself in certain attitudes towards life, events, circumstances, limitations
 - o Life is very important and precious
We have wonderful things to think about and to seek
We should not waste our time, but use it in order to fill ourselves with truth, love and zeal for the Kingdom (hard work in the Lord’s service)
 - o Man has great possibilities (capabilities)
“God does everything and man does too.”
In face of difficulties, sufferings and hardships, God does not want us to be passive but to use our freedom and intelligence, the means at our disposition, to make the best of all situations for His service and glory.
 - o Everything works unto Good for those who love God – even sin (just get up and get on with it)
 - o Nothing can hinder us when we face all things with the certitude of faith. We go through all situations with joyful detachment, strength, trust, liberty of spirit, simplicity and openness.

- Sin is the great hindrance in our relationship with God. It holds us back from Him
 - o Sin clouds man’s vision and makes him self-centred¹⁴⁰, carnal.
 - o Self-centredness¹⁴¹, preoccupation with self and the forgetfulness of God are the maladies of all times.
 - o Our lives should be a protest. **

***Evangelica Testificatio N°19 “You are to remind men that their true and complete progress consists in responding their calling ‘to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men!’”*

¹³⁹ Instead of « the doctrine » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁴⁰ Instead of « self-centered » - US (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

¹⁴¹ Instead of « self-centeredness » -US (Sr. Marie – February 2021)

N° 8 *“Eternal contemplation is the common vocation of us all”*
See also Nos 45 and 52.

Conclusion: Everything else is relative compared with the major concern of our life:

- God
- The Kingdom.

The result is Joy.

(Joyful detachment = total openness to God who is sufficient to fill a life)

III- WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS ABOUT JOYFUL DETACHMENT.

- Mark 8, 35
- Matt. 6, 20-21
- Matt. 19,29
- Rom. 8,1-17

NOTES from the T.O.B.

v. 2: “The law of the Spirit”... This expression is like a resumé of Jer. 31, 33 and Ez. 36,27;37, 14. Renewed and transformed by the Spirit of God given by Jesus, the believer can obey the will of God which is no longer for him an exterior constraint but the interior law of his new life.

v. 13: “If you live according to the flesh you will die”... Literally: you make the works of the body die. Body in this text is synonymous with flesh and designates a kind of life centered on self. (Rom. 6,6)

v. 15: “Abba, Father”... the word familiar to children, Papa. Unknown in the Jewish religious vocabulary, Abba is an expression of filial intimacy which is full of tenderness and familiarity, the relationship of Jesus with his Father (Mark 14,36; Mt 11,25; Luke 22,42 etc.) Our adoptive filiation makes us participate in this relationship (Gal. 4, 6). Perhaps Paul alludes to the opening words of the Our Father in the Lucan tradition (Luke 11,2).

- Col. 3,1-4

July 19, 1980

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE

(Ch. 28.12.1879)

M. Hélène Marie

“God, who created human nature in His own image, loves this work of His hands. . . An existence which is the most humble, the most obscure, the most despised, holds for Him a profound interest and He follows all its movements and observes all the phases through which it must pass. He is the Friend Who knows your joys and sorrows and understands all our emotions.” (p. 479)

The act of creation explains this love of God for man. However, this chapter of Marie Eugénie was inspired by the Season of Christmas and another proof of the love of God for man is the Incarnation and the Redemption.

“The existence of man is precious enough in the eyes of God for Him to spend the blood of His son for it.” (478)

But the main point of the Chapter is expressed in this sentence:

“If God has always had so much esteem for the existence of Man, how much more importance then must we attach to our existence.” (478)

Here is the echo of what John Paul II says in “Redemptor Hominis” and in all his discourses. “Man himself is the first way of the Church, a way traced by Christ Himself, a way which passes through the Incarnation and the Redemption.” (R.H. 14)

What are we doing with our life, “our only life”, as Psalm 21 says. That is what Marie Eugénie asks us. Once, when she was only 37, she wrote:” My God, how serious life is and how I realise it more and more!” (12-2399-54)
The Gospel “makes straight what is crooked, releases those who are enchained.” To those who may have been brought in by the nets of fatigue and anxiety or may be just laziness or negligence, it gives the strength to live, the will to go on. The life of Faith is also Faith in life. The energy to believe is thus energy to live. To turn back to God is to recover our belief in man beyond all the gropings, the illusions, all the hopelessness and all the deadlocks.

“Each moment of our life is precious to Him.” (480)

Marie Eugénie repeats herself again. The fulfilment¹⁴² of man is the joy of God. If I exist it is because I am worthwhile to God.

But see how she becomes very concrete:

“If we have not already done it, let us begin our lives again now. .. Leaving everything behind us, all the oppositions, the preoccupations, the distractions, all the things in which up to now we have wasted our lives... I will begin again a life which I will give almost as much importance as God does.” (482)

And here, I would like to add, that for the Congregation today, what is most Important is the life of each sister (cf. “Open Letter ’77, p.6). The richness of the Congregation- is you, us, it is the sisters; what matters for the Coming of the Kingdom is the life of each one of us, the human and spiritual energy at the depths of each one. It is the decision taken today and again tomorrow, to live for God...because to live for God is to live more fully. It is the desire and the will to adore God, to know Jesus Christ, to imitate Him, to follow Him, to be united to Him, to extend His Kingdom by and in the Church...It is the desire and the will to live just something: the little bit that we have been able to understand and retain.

That which we are here and now, is great and important in the eyes of God and in our eyes too. The Church, the Assumption, has need of each of us and I would like, this evening, that we would really believe it; my life, my poor life with its weaknesses, its sins, its age, its past which has been more or less successful, its fragility; my life, with its fears and anguishes, its ups and downs, is precious, indispensable for the Kingdom because God wills to have need of it and because He loves me. From now on, I will rise, hold myself upright and walk, humbly, I will go forward following Jesus.

So it is that from generation to generation, the Faith of Marie Eugénie challenges ours. Look at the end of the Chapter of 28.12.1878, it is Marie Eugénie who must have the last word of this Session.

“I will try not to leave God...

I will lift my gaze to Him as often as possible...

I will place my hand in God’s and follow Him everywhere so that by His Cross and Passion,

As we say in the Angelus, I reach the blessedness of Eternity.” (483)

¹⁴² Instead of « fulfillment » (Sr. Marie – February 2021)