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ON AFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE LOVE

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

The aim of any form of religious life is love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Generally, when one leaves the world to embrace the evangelical counsels, it is out of love and for love of Our Lord. Therefore, I think it is most fitting to talk to you on this love today, the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. I will address to you but a few words to remind you of this love which should be both affective and effective.

There are times when one does not feel one's love for Our Lord with as much ardour as one would wish. One feels cold; it seems that one does not make any progress in love and the soul becomes anxious. Let me tell you, first of all, that when one has affective love, Our Lord deigns to let Himself be felt in the soul. Grace, one would say, takes over, and the soul need do nothing but allow itself to be carried, for, as the Imitation says, he is well-sustained who allows grace to bear him. But one is not always carried: one must likewise walk. St. Francis of Sales used to say in his picturesque style, that the parents of the Blessed Virgin carried her in their arms to the Temple, but, from time to time, they would put her down and took delight in seeing her take little steps, And the saint adds, so it is for the soul carried by the Holy Spirit.

But what must one do to arrive at affective love? First and foremost, one must often make acts of love of God for, as St. Teresa says, they move the heart and inflame it. Hence, in all things, make frequent acts of love of God.

There are other means, some negative, others positive, which help the soul in a special way to put the love of God above all other loves. For example, when on seeing or perceiving human beauty of whatever sort, or when one is struck by a lovely scene, one takes the habit of lifting one's mind to the author of all beauty, to him who made all that is beautiful on earth and, consequently, rises above all created beauty, he increases in us the feeling of divine love.

The saints practiced this a great deal. At the sight of a lovely flower, a ravishing sunset, they would rise up to God and exclaim: "What beauty is yours, O my God, you who have placed in these things, which are nevertheless so beautiful, but a reflection of your admirable beauty!" One meeting saintly souls, lofty minds, they would turn to God and say: "All these come from you, O my God, but how much the affections of your Heart, the thoughts of your Intellect surpass all these!" Likewise, all intellectual beauty reminded them of the Word from whom came all light spread throughout the world.

When acting thus we take the spirit of St. Augustine. He who had such great intelligence, such a profound soul, always pondered on that beauty which is ever ancient and ever new, who is God. From all intellectual and human beauty he would rise to love, truth, to holiness, to the greatness of Jesus Christ. Also, he used to say that if one presents Jesus Christ to a soul, one attracts her just as one attracts a child by presenting to him that which he longs for. The Word, the Son of God who came down on earth, was the constant object of the contemplation of his mind, the affections of his heart, the desires of his will. You understand, my dear Sisters, that one's affective love grows when, with regard to all things on earth,

which could be the objects of praise, of love, of admiration, one transcends to Him who is infinitely more perfect, more beautiful, more lovable.

I would add, one grows in affective love in another manner, but this depends a great deal on the particular disposition of each individual soul. In general, the heart which is disposed to love Our Lord, is likewise disposed to love something earthly besides. It would be a peculiar heart, which being open to Christ would be closed to the things of this world. It should be capable of loving something else, but each time that this love directs itself to a creature, he should put Christ between himself and this creature. I suppose one is sensitive to suffering. When one sees a loved one suffer, one is keenly touched. Well, when one is thus moved, one should think of what Christ suffered for us; one should put before oneself the sufferings of his Passion which, humanly speaking, surpassed all that one can imagine.

By what else can one be affected? By a separation, the distance from someone dear to us. Well, one should say: "On earth I am separated from Jesus Christ and this is the separation I should feel most." Since Christ's ascension into heaven the Church has been in a state of widowhood, as Christ himself has said in answer to those who asked him why the Apostles did not fast.

One applies this state particularly to the religious soul. As a matter of fact, she does not possess him whom she would like to live with; she expects him, she sees him but in a veiled form, she speaks to him but in a mysterious manner. She still cannot carry on that relationship with Christ she aspires to.

If, in all one's affections, in one's emotions, in all that touches one deeply, one acquires the habit of directing them all to Our Lord, one grows in affective love.

One can grow in affective love in another way. It is by picturing to oneself the love of all the saints for Our Lord. Pius VI approved the litany which begs of God the perfection of their love for him.

This litany is not necessary; but the soul can gain a great deal if she spends some time on the love of Mary Magdalen for Our Lord, and at other times on the love of St. Peter, on the love of St. John, for God is the author of this marvel: the form of love of the saints is a particular creation for each of them, so much so that the love of one was not the same as that of the other. You can, therefore, take at times the love of Our Lady, at other times, that of St. Joseph, of the holy Apostles, of the disciples, of the holy women, of St. Cecilia, St. Agnes, St. Gertrude, St. Dominique, St. Benedict, etc. You understand that living in such an atmosphere, occupying your mind with such a marvel, as the soul of a saint, you will, one day, enter into that love which you ask God to grant you and you will grow in affective love.

I now come to effective love. In what does it consist? To do all that pleases the Beloved, and, consequently, above all things, to rid oneself of all that displeases Him, that is to say, all the remains of the seven capital sins, all our selfish tendencies. If you want to progress in affective love, you must grow likewise in effective love by doing all that pleases God and by removing from your souls all that displeases Him. "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord, who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven,'" (Mt. 7:21) Our Lord said; and again, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jn.14:15). How can we acquire this mark of love? By doing the will of God every moment in our work, by always looking for that which pleases Him, by suppressing in our souls all that displeases Him; all, even the least gesture, even one word in times of silence, rendering each of our actions, according to St. Francis of Sales, a perpetual "Yes" to God.

You see by this that affective love and effective love grow simultaneously. In order that affective love be true and ardent, it is necessary that always, in our prayer, in our relations with each other and with the children, in our work, in all things and at all times, we do God's will and seek only to please Him.

That is why I came from examples of the saints to effective love. When we penetrate into the heart of St. Peter, of St. Andrew, of St. John, of the great virgin martyrs, of the great saints who founded churches, etc., we see the ardour, the holy flame of affective love: but we never saw it without the corresponding efforts, without that great purity of intention and of act, without that great fidelity in the smallest things, without that generous detachment of all that displeased Him.

I cannot think of anything better to say on this feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. This Name is powerful. We should have it often on our lips to guard ourselves against danger and to strengthen us.

In the legend we read in the Divine Office, day before yesterday, we read that St. Anthony often repeated to his monks that there was no more effective weapon against the devil than an ardent love for Our Lord Jesus Christ. For us, too, do we want not to be overcome by the trials of this world which comes from the devil, trials of revolutions, trials due to the wickedness of men, temptations? Let us be inspired by a great love for Our Lord; let us try to acquire every day new ways of showing tenderness in our love for Our Lord. Then, we shall be strong against the world, for it can do nothing against those who love Our Lord Jesus Christ, as Holy Scripture ceaselessly repeats.