

Relations with Outsiders

11th May 1873

My dear Daughters,

This is an important point of the Rule and we must often reflect before God on how to reconcile these two difficult things: on one hand, to please the outsiders by gentleness, charity, the honour proper to the state of each one, - for who does not deserve a little consideration? And on the other hand, to watch over ourselves so that we do not let ourselves go and be absorbed by people outside.

This demands work. It requires a habit which should be formed when we are young. Otherwise, sooner or later, we will let ourselves easily be invaded by the spirit of the world. Our first duty as Religious is to keep the Rule, then charity for outsiders. Let us therefore put all our effort into acquiring the liberty of spirit necessary to bring to each exercise the spirit of detachment that is rigorously required.

If we let ourselves be overrun by outsiders, who are in general very exacting, we will come back with a tired spirit, preoccupied, distressed. We will find it difficult to return to the community, to the refectory, to recreation with our Sisters. We will make our spiritual exercises carelessly or in haste. That is going to be a lifestyle detrimental to the community, detrimental to health, and even detrimental to the apostolate.

School is one of our works that obliges us most to have relations with outsiders. Let us then be on our guard and let us not be caught in the pitfall of talking too much for useless things.

Generally, Religious speak more reasonably, and more briefly than the people of the world. They do not feel obliged, when they tell a story, to start from the deluge in order to arrive at the end of the world, because the effort of their whole life must be to put a certain moderation in their words. This is a mark of interior moderation and a sign of a person who prays.

People of the world who do not have, like us, the obligation to give themselves over to prayer, to the interior life, who do not like to be told they are wrong nor accept corrections, need to talk a lot. I had an encounter with a very devout but very talkative person. When I spoke about him to his confessor, he answered me: "Oh, I can do nothing about that." It is like this with most people of the world. I do not think they are doing wrong; besides I gave you an example of a very virtuous person. They need an outlet; hence, the abundance of speech.

We can listen to them amiably, sincerely; while at the same time let them know that we have our work - that our work with our children calls us and we cannot stay more than 20 to 25 minutes; at most half an hour, to listen to them.

In many religious orders, even those who are the most given to the service of their neighbour, the Rule lays down that one does not spend more than half an hour in the parlour, unless for something particularly useful, or out of absolute necessity. In the Dominican Order, it is posted in the parlours that the religious cannot stay there more than half an hour, without special permission. It appears hard sometimes. But one can say enough in half an hour and discover the whole state of a soul. Then you can always go back there several times.

Likewise, if the parents of the children call us to the parlour we must receive them amiably, but as they often tell us the same things, we must make them understand clearly that it is not our custom to prolong visits to the parlour. And thus, while accepting the need to see the parents of our children, we gently disengage ourselves from long and useless conversations.

This I know, is a difficult art - to always remain gentle, friendly, knowing how to disengage ourselves from people without causing displeasure. It is so natural to be impatient and be annoyed in listening to long discourses; but it is necessary to strive always to combine patience with a certain gentle firmness.

Reflect then, Sisters, and see how you behave with outsiders. One has to bring a pleasant and amiable attitude to the parlour and let people talk. They will go home much

more pleased with you than if they had talked of all they wanted to.

After having spent an hour with a man who listened to her without saying a word, Mme. de Staël said: "I never thought him to be of so much character and nevertheless, he is." Mme de Staël was certainly a good judge, that proves how the skill to know how to listen and keep quiet at the right time is appreciated by people of the world. In your relations with the parents of the children, know then how to listen, contenting yourself in inserting two or three words from time to time in the conversation. And you will see that they will leave much more satisfied.

My dear Daughters, we must learn all this in detail, and establish ourselves in charity, zeal and regularity, in order to maintain always this part of our separation from the world which is given us to help our recollection – so that we may know how to reconcile the gift of self, which is part of our vocation and the habit of returning within oneself as often as possible.

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