



February 1, 1891

Before Lent
The Groans of the Holy Spirit in Our Souls

My dear Sisters,

I have been asked if I could speak to you about the groans of the Holy Spirit within our souls¹. This subject is very timely as we must enter into a deeper recollection through the holy forty days of Lent. It is a time when we must apply ourselves more to prayer, to recollection, to the interior life. We will not observe great austerities; few will distinguish themselves by their vigils and fasts. Therefore, we must compensate for this with prayer and recollection and strive to make the holy forty days a time when we are more under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Why then does the Church speak of the *inexpressible groans of the Holy Spirit within us*²? The reason is quite simple and easy to understand if we remember that we have become temples of the Holy Spirit, of the third person of the Holy Trinity, the love of the Father and the Son. What must He feel within our souls, and what must His groans be when He sees the profound misery in which we find ourselves? Where has the Holy Spirit had a dwelling worthy of Him? He had it in the soul of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, perhaps in the souls of some saints attentive to being faithful to all His inspirations, but within us?

I would like you to examine the extent of your own misery, your petty pursuits of inferior things, your feelings unworthy of such a great grace as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. Who among you would dare say: "Oh! The Holy Spirit may delight in my soul; surely this Divine Dove finds there only humble, fervent feelings, perfect charity—everything that can ensure He is not wounded by anything, that nothing can distance Him, nothing can be painful to Him." No, you would not be sincere if you said that. You know full well, on the contrary, that each of us carries within us either pride, self-love, sensitivity, or cowardice, self-seeking, or other imperfections—all those things, in short, that render you unworthy to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Then the Holy Spirit groans for you before the throne of God, asking that you be a more worthy dwelling place for Him, asking that you be what you will one day be in heaven when you are completely purified. The purification may be long; you may have a long purgatory to separate yourselves entirely from yourselves and complete within yourselves what makes one pure, spotless, and perfectly pleasing to God. This purification is the first point; there is a second, for if on one hand He wants to purify you, do you believe that the Holy Spirit, this flame so pure and so ardent, does not desire something more? Yes, certainly. Besides the purification that removes

¹ Request from Mother Claire-Emmanuel

² Cf. Rom. 8,26

stains, He also desires advancement and virtue, for a Religious must consider not only her sinful side, but also her virtuous side.

Let us take, if you will, the opposite of the seven deadly sins. Which of you could say: "Surely the Holy Spirit has every reason to be pleased with the humility He finds in me, with my courage, my generosity, my ardent desire to be humbled; there is much joy to give Him in this."

Then let us consider the religious virtues: poverty is also a virtue that has ascending degrees; there can be a more complete detachment, a more perfect poverty in some than in others. The Holy Spirit desires this. Obedience has degrees. You know well that after fulfilling the vow, there is virtue; these are so many degrees by which one ascends. Then there is purity, a certain purity that consists in not defiling oneself voluntarily; Yes, I believe you have it, but I am speaking here of the purity of heart which makes one become like a crystal through which the light of the Holy Spirit can pass, the purity of intention, of action which makes one see only God, which makes one seek only Him.

I immediately embraced poverty, chastity, and obedience because these are religious virtues. And what is the Holy Spirit doing in us? Where do we stand? Can He desire anything else in us other than the growth of these virtues? Let us also consider our patience. How much the Holy Spirit must expect from you both dispositions of patience and acts of patience! There are Sisters who are tested more in this regard; we have certain troubles, certain contradictions, we cannot dedicate ourselves to the education of children without suffering at their hands. Where does your patience stand? Through what effects is this demonstrated?

Notice that in today's Gospel Our Lord tells us that *the grain that falls on good soil bears fruit through patience*³. Where, then, does our patience stand? I told you once that Urban II, upon entering a monastery, said: "I will preach patience to them; there is no virtue more necessary to Religious men." To what extent are you patient?

Patience comes from *pati*, to suffer. We must suffer from above, from below, from our character, from our mood, from our health, from difficulties in prayer, from certain sorrows and dryness, from temptations: it is then that we become patient. Saint Catherine of Siena, after a horrible temptation that had assailed her, said to Our Lord: *Where were you during all this time? – I was in the depths of your heart, I saw your struggles and I gave you the victory*. The same is true for the virgin martyrs, how courageously they fought! Saint Agnes died by the sword, but before that she went through fire, through all dangers, everything was permitted and tried against her, and she conquered, always patient, full of faith and trust in God.

For me, with my limited understanding, this is what I see in the groans of the Holy Spirit: He groans because of our imperfections. An author I quite liked said: *The Christian is like a lit candle; the wax is the body, the wick is the soul, and the light is the Holy Spirit*. What could be more united than light and a lit candle? It feeds on it, it lives on it. The Holy Spirit is in you in a wondrous way.

You are the temple of God, says the Rule of Saint Augustine, following Saint Paul⁴. What more could you wish for? You must join Him in His groans over your imperfections, diminish their

³ Lk 8, 15

⁴ 1 Cor 3, 16-17 and Cf. 2 Cor 6, 16.

number, and desire to acquire the virtues with which the Holy Spirit inspires you. All saints became saints only by following the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

If the Blessed Virgin is so great, it is because she received all the graces of the Holy Spirit with admirable fidelity; she corresponded to them all, and grace returned to her doubled, tripled, quadrupled; there was no measure. When grace comes to us, it comes in many forms: in the form of contradiction, humiliation, reproach, suffering; there is no suffering that is not a grace. How do we receive it? With what humility, what patience, what submission to the will of God? This is what we must strive to do in order to be judged worthy of this presence of the Holy Spirit within us. We must also love God through the Holy Spirit, and this is a very intelligent and very noble thing, for He, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, gives us a love much more perfect, much greater, much holier than our own.

There is still much to be done in responding to the Holy Spirit within you, in receiving the touches of the Holy Spirit, in being faithful to them: highly evolved souls are very sensitive to the touches of the Holy Spirit; they respond with faith, hope, and love; this is to be a docile instrument of Him. If it happened to a musical Sister that a piano key she struck did not respond, what would she do? Alas! The Holy Spirit touches us in the most intimate, the deepest part of our soul, and we do not respond.

Father Lacordaire says that there is a secret of the soul that God has reserved for Himself, and He, the author of the soul who knows it because He made it, later comes to place His hand to touch this innermost part of the soul and bring forth sanctification. This is the story of all of us. God is always ready to place His hand in the innermost part of our souls to bring forth sanctification. What prevents us from becoming sanctified? It is ourselves. We are told this in all retreats: there is an obstacle, and that is ourselves, our self-love, our pursuits, our personality, our petty pride, our petty desires. If we could generously offer this once to our Lord, the Holy Spirit would be the master and He would do in us all that He willed.