

OF LOVE AND PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

Feast of the Sovereign Pontiffs

July 11, 1880

Today, dear Sisters, we celebrate the feast of all the Sovereign Pontiffs, -- of all those who have successively passed on the seat of St. Peter, suffering, spending their life for the salvation of souls, for the good of the Church. This feast ought to help us to renew within ourselves love for the Church, to pray especially for the needs of the Church which are so many and so great to-day! The Church suffers in so many countries!

What is the Church, dear Sisters? It is the assembly of the faithful under its legitimate pastors. The Church therefore, is the assembly of the faithful: all baptised persons belong to the Church. What is not done at this moment to snatch baptised souls from the action of Jesus Christ, from the action of the Church, from the action of legitimate pastors?

It is one of the greatest motives for prayer, for sacrifice, for efforts on oneself: to obtain the salvation of many souls which are exposed to a series of evil undertakings against the Church -- the souls of children, for example, who can offer no resistance. If they are not taught what is good, if nobody applies himself to destroy in them the evil roots left by original sin, can these poor souls defend themselves? Are they not exposed to be lost? These are the most innocent of the flock of Jesus Christ; they are defenseless; it is a massacre of innocents and there are those who want to snatch them and deliver them to the devil.

Prayer alone can react against this and

along with prayer, holiness. One ought to try to put oneself in holy dispositions, in dispositions which are pleasing to God; to stimulate one's prayer with greater self-renunciation, greater love of God -- in order to save many poor souls, so that the power of God manifests itself and, making itself known, God may scatter his enemies.

It is certain that if prayer is ardent during unfortunate times, it can turn away calamities. We have examples of graces thus obtained. During the barbarian invasions, St. Leo stopped Attila before Rome; in France, we see St. Genevieve stopping them before Paris; St. Loup, at Troyes, St. Aignan at Orleans. If these Saints were able to do this it was because of the power they had before God in being his perfect servants.

At this moment, it is above all the religious who ought to exert every effort to become perfect servants of God. May each one of you, by the intimate knowledge of yourselves -- of what you ought to reject and of what you ought to keep, seek to sanctify yourselves so as to be more powerful in prayer and thus become a help to the Church.

#### ON FAITH

July 18, 1880

My dear Sisters,

I want to-day to call your attention to some words read this morning at the Gospel. Our Lord said to his Apostles: "I call you friends, I shall not call you servants anymore".

These words of Our Lord can be applied to us also: we are no longer servants. Certainly we are servants in the sense which made Our Lady say: "I am the handmaid of the Lord"; (L. 1, 38) but we are more than that, since we are Our Lord's spouses. It is to us that these other words are addressed: "I appointed you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last" (Jn. 15,16). What is this fruit, dear Sisters? Why have we been called to this Congregation? So that we may bear fruit and this fruit may last.

Think of all the Congregations, all the religious Orders. What is precisely the abundant fruit that the first religious of these Orders or Congregations have borne? Many did not do great things; nevertheless they bore fruit, the fruit of good example and the practice of all religious virtues. This is the excellent fruit Our Lord expects of his spouses and that we have to bear so that it lasts.

Do you remember St. Clare? What did she do? She went in spite of many obstacles, to enclose herself in a little monastery which I saw at Assisi..... It is there that she lived in poverty, with some religious, enclosed and unknown to the world; nevertheless they bore fruit and that fruit has lasted. What was this fruit? It is very important to study this, so as to seek which is the main fruit Our Lord expects of us.

At times one is prone to think that one is a good teacher, that the children succeed, that one is a good talker: but this fruit is not worth much; I shall come back on this subject.

The most important fruit is the fruit of a holy life, which is the foundation of a religious Congregation. The remembrance of these beginnings will teach those who will enter later on how to lead a holy life, for we have been

"appointed to bear fruit, fruit that will last". One cannot sufficiently ask oneself this question: "What is the fruit I bear? Is my whole life really a life of abnegation, obedience, humility, poverty, regularity? Are these the examples I have given in my work, during illness, during my whole life, and which I shall leave after my death? Will they be able to say: "How one would wish to live as this sister has lived, to work, to be ill and to die in her dispositions?"

In order to do this and to have the spiritual strength for it, I shall now point out what is its foundation. All religious in general and specially the religious of the Assumption should have a great spirit of faith. The more faith we have, the more we shall bear fruit; the more we shall look at things the way God looks at them, the more we shall become what the Congregation wants of us. Each Congregation has its own spirit; our spirit consists in being enlightened by the light of faith, the light of prayer which could illumine our whole life; our spirit is to put all things which faith shows us as important, infinitely above all things prized by the purely human mind. The fruit for a religious of the Assumption is to leave aside this life of earth, the life of the senses in order to show a great spirit of faith towards all earthly things.

You all know, Sisters, what is the virtue of faith. It is a supernatural virtue infused at baptism, and which makes us say: "I believe, I am a Christian". It is a virtue which goes Godwards, and what we believe is not necessarily what our intelligence judges as wise. But we believe in God, in the divine truths revealed which will lead us to eternal life, that is, to the supreme good.

God gives us light. He puts into our soul grace, through which we firmly believe in this light given to the Church, brought to earth by his only Son..... But so that this virtue may blaze out, shine and be powerful in us, so that this grace brought by the sacrament may be greater, we must ask for its increase. The Apostle St. Peter said: "Lord, increase my faith." (Lk. 17,5) We should say to God everyday: "Lord, I believe all you teach, but increase my faith. Let it pervade my whole life, and let the spirit of faith seize me more completely."

All the virtues of our state of life should rest on the spirit of faith. We should ask for faith not only for ourselves, but also for others. We should be full of zeal and in a habitual prayer we should ask for those who already believe, courage and firmness in their faith. How many souls have been baptized and later have denied this divine faith. How many trust more to their own reason than to the ways and thoughts of faith, because these do not agree with their own thoughts and also with the disorder of their hearts. We should so pray for them so that faith may be kept in our country, in the places where the Church has been established, so that it may shine and be stronger in those consecrated to the works of faith, such as priests, religious, lay apostles, and ask God that it may not be the human spirit but the spirit of faith which inspires them and guides them.

I shall speak now of the children we have in our care. I told you before that to make them succeed in their studies was not very important. The main thing is to establish faith in the soul of the children, to make them ream Christians who, through faith, do the work Our Lord taught us to do, who love

Christ, his Church, truth, and live by the truth. This requires a tremendous effort. Their intelligence should be penetrated by the light of faith; their heart too, so that they may hate sin and have a lively faith. When one knows what sin is, that it separates us from the sovereign good, it is the evil one fears most. This does not mean that no one will ever fall into it, but if some one with deep faith sins, anguish and remorse will seize her soul until she makes a complete break with this dreadful evil.

Finally, let us ask for ourselves and for others a spontaneous faith. I mean by this a deep rooted faith, ardent and lively, which represents any offence made to God, to the Crucifix, the Virgin Mary and the Saints. We should ask for this real love which prizes all we possess in the supernatural, divine order, which leads us to eternal life.

I would have still much to tell you. Don't forget specially to ask for a great faith, weighing according to faith everything in your life, your work, your difficulties, your likes and dislikes, holding as little what faith does not consider important.

Feast of St. Peter in Chains  
August 1, 1880

How we should build on the rock which  
is Jesus Christ, which is the Church,  
through the sacrifice of ourselves.

I have, my dear Sisters, but a few words  
to say to you about today's feast, about St.  
Peter whom we honor under this name, the ob-  
ject of our devotion, for Our Lord said to him:  
"You are Peter and on this rock I will build  
my Church." (Mat.16:18)

As one of the Fathers whose homily we read  
in the Office said, there is but one rock which  
is Jesus Christ. It is on Our Lord Jesus Christ  
that we are founded, that all is built; but  
Our Lord has deigned to make of the Church his  
mystical body, so that he has given St. Peter  
this prerogative which also makes him the rock  
on which we build. We build for eternity, that  
is what one calls to edify: to edify one's  
neighbor, to bring about his salvation.

In each one of our actions, we build for  
eternity, because we believe, because we place  
ourselves on the rock, first on this cornerstone  
which is Jesus Christ, and on this rock which  
is the faith of the Church. But how do we  
build? This is the second question one should  
ask. We build on sacrifice. St. Peter built  
through sacrifice, through renunciation. Our  
Lord Jesus Christ had foretold him: "Somebody  
else will put a belt around you and take you  
where you would rather not go." (Jn.21:18). Af-  
ter his conversion he was led where he would  
not. All the Apostles have likewise built  
through sacrifice.

What a life that of the Apostles, sent by  
Our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth!

What a life that of St. Thomas, for example, who travelled through India and who probably went as far as America and Japan, - and you know how difficult the means of communication were at that time. What a life that of St. Peter and St. Paul. They gave themselves entirely to the evangelization of the world. They were bound, despised, betrayed, enclosed in the frightful prisons of which one can have an idea by visiting the Mamertine prison, and they were finally killed. It is then through sacrifice that they built.

But let us not only consider in them the exterior sacrifice, that of suffering, isolation, persecution; let us consider above all the interior sacrifice. They think no longer of themselves. They have given up all for Jesus Christ. No longer individualistic, they establish a church and they do not stay there; they start a work and they do not have the consolation of finishing it. They leave their families, their relatives for Jesus Christ, going to the ends of the world and never seeing them again. There is nothing more of self, no more question of self, in their words, in their epistles. If St. Paul is obliged to speak of himself to answer the accusations of the Jews, he defends himself, he apologizes for it saying: "I am a fool, a madman, to have spoken in this way of myself." And if he is obliged to speak well of himself, he then speaks of the most humiliating things. One feels that the Apostles do not take into account either self or their own life; they are only busy evangelizing, making Our Lord Jesus Christ known.

You know what St. Paul said when they came to tell him that others preached in the name of Jesus Christ to make the Jews and the Romans doubt the truth of his words. He answered: "What does it matter to me that the name of Our Lord be announced by honor or by



ignominy, as long as this name is known, adored, served, and that all goes towards him."

One should often check oneself on this subject. We build on the rock which is the Church, which thanks be to God, is whole in our souls; but we should not build with straw, with materials which the wind blows away: the esteem of people, success, self-satisfaction. One has to build on sacrifice, a sacrifice which goes into one's very depth. This is the work of every day, of every age; one should therefore search and see wherein self-love still lies in us, for self-love should be detested. All that is attached to "me", all that remains of self-love under one form or another, all that should be done away with. Whether I be in consolation or not, whether I like what I am doing or not, whether I meet opposition, do not enjoy the trust, the esteem of my superiors, etc. ... all these thoughts show self-love; and as there is a great danger of this fault developing in old age, (we see this in people outside) it is necessary to work at destroying it. In all that we say, in all that we do, it should not be self-love that should show itself, but the desire of the glory and service of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are building a religious Congregation. There is none among us whose words, whose example, whose behavior does not contribute to the building of this religious Congregation. What does it matter what each of us does! She works not for herself but upholds a religious Congregation. When the swallow goes to look for the straw with which she builds her nest, it is for herself that she works. But when the religious does something, it is not for herself that she works but for God; so that those who will enter this Congregation find there their sanctification.

This is one of the most practical points over which one should constantly examine oneself.

One must search, morning and evening, in one's words, in one's actions, one's preoccupation, one's recreations, wherein self-love comes in; and make an effort to destroy all that is selfish, strive to live always detached of self and from earthly things. Be ready to go here and there, to be sick or in good health, to do always the same thing, the same work, if this is the will of God. Father Lacordaire said: "The crown of eternity never falls more straight from heaven than on a head whitened in the humility of hard work."

It is the sure way of building well. It is what blessed Rodriguez, lay brother and porter of the Jesuits in Portugal did. He built much not only because he edified, was canonized; but because his conversation, his prayers, his zeal brought forth (without his doing anything but praying and loving God) a number of evangelical workers in the Company of Jesus. One thinks that blessed P. Claver had drawn his zeal, his humility, his spirit of mortification and of prayer from the example of the poor lay brother who did not give any talks or sermons, but edified in silence.

Everytime you celebrate a feast of St. Peter, think of building on the rock by means of sacrifice. St. Peter, after the resurrection, gave himself totally to the service of Our Lord. He who was so fiery, so affectionate, who could not do without the presence of the Master, who was always ready to serve him, went traveling all over the world, not looking for any other consolation than that of glorifying him; and he was thus that rock on which we should build imitating the example of the Apostles.

... and creatures are nothing

Aug. 10, 1880

For a week ... reading the Book of Wisdom during the Office ... I would have something to say to you in connection with the magnificent eulogy of Wisdom which the Holy Spirit makes. Without any doubt, it deals with uncreated Wisdom, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, who presided over the creation of the earth, who existed before the mountains, who has created all things. But it deals also with human wisdom; for the Holy Spirit immediately goes down, in the Sapiential Books, to a great number of considerations which lead to human wisdom. The beginning of this wisdom is the fear of the Lord. But what is its end? It is the knowledge of things as they are. I will sum them up thus, for I do not wish to lose myself in long preambles. All the wisdom of man and above all that of the religious consists in knowing that God is all and that created things are nothing.

The more one advances in the religious life, in perfection, in prayer, the more one should understand God Who is All and the nothingness of created things. Created things without doubt are something, since God made them; but they are something only in relation to their end. St. Ignatius explains marvelously well, that while man is made for God, that while his wisdom consists in knowing God who made him to his image and should return to God who is his end, created things are made for man in view of God. It is not so that man may use and abuse them at will, that he usurps them, that he make them his pleasure and his end in this world; but they are intended to serve a higher end, that of leading man to God.

It is useful therefore before a retreat to return with a spiritual outlook to this great

principle. Whatever form you give to your retreat, it is necessary to go back over these first truths, whether you take them as they are exposed in the exercises of St. Ignatius, or as they are in your catechism which teaches you that man was made to know God, love him and serve him; and since all created things should converge towards this end, one can begin by this work of the mind which consists in telling oneself: "I should be in the order of Wisdom, I am the spouse of him Who is Uncreated Wisdom, and I have chosen to be counted not among the foolish virgins, but among the wise ones who hold their lamps in their hands, who keep it burning with oil and who use it to light their way. But does Wisdom preside over all my actions? In the course of the year what use have I made of created things?"

This thought which can occupy only one meditation during the retreat, can be the object of several reflexions in the preparation for the retreat and I urge you to ask yourselves: "What have created things been for me? Have they been an obstacle, have they been an attraction, have they been the cause of sharp contradiction or of desolations? Have I, in practice, with regard to the things of life, acted as one for whom the things of time are of little importance and who seeks to establish herself and actually makes herself indifferent towards all created things, in such a way as to prefer always the holy will of God?"

Created things are a means, in themselves they are indifferent, they should be chosen only in as far as they lead us to our end which is God. That is why in the religious state we renounce things which in the world have the greatest attraction for creatures. One looks for beauty in creatures, for pleasure in creatures, for possessions, well-being,

amusement, enjoyment, soft ness. For us, we separate ourselves from all that, and to this end that God be the sole purpose of the relations we have with created things.

Because of temptations from the devil or from the weakness of our own nature, it may happen that a small created thing is an obstacle. St. Terese says that even in the most cloistered monasteries, a certain point of honor may enter: esteem, preoccupation over one's work, over one's health. All this enters into the order of created things, and Our Lord teaches us that in these things, what is most painful is what leads us most surely to our end: resemblance to Our Lord Jesus Christ, union with God, the possession of God.

What did Our Lord Jesus Christ choose while on earth? Poverty, humiliation, suffering. Take these three virtues under the most diverse forms that you may wish; his life consisted in this. His humility was perfect, his obedience absolute, his work so lowly that later they will say of him: "Is not that a workman, "faber" - and the son of a workman, "filius fabri"? Where did he receive all this learning since he has not been to school?" This is the choice that Our Lord made of the things of life. For us, St. Ignatius says, we do not have to make a choice; but if there was one, it should be that which should bring us closest to the suffering, the lowliness, the cross of Our Lord.

These thoughts do not enter easily into the minds of men; happy will you be, Sisters, if they enter yours, even before entering your heart. The heart follows in the long run the understanding. It is necessary then to begin by persuading the mind and showing it which is the real good. The real good is what Wisdom brings. Solomon teaches us this, he who had received the fulness of Wisdom. Having let

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joyed all that one can do for God, I  
care no himself as for: "Vanity of vanities,  
all is vanity: affliction of spirit." (Ec.  
1:2, 14). And we should add: except to love  
God and serve Him. It is to be feared that  
Solomon did not add this; so that one doubts  
somewhat of his salvation.

The more one advances in prayer, the more  
light she receives from God and the more she is  
filled with the holy conviction of God being  
all and of everything being nothing. This is  
the true fruit of prayer: God is all for the  
soul and her only fear is to put between God  
and self any created thing. Someone said in  
speaking of created things: "Receive them,  
fear them, return them." Receive them from  
God; let it be from his hand that you take all  
things. If they are pleasant, give thanks; if  
they are bitter, give thanks again: it is a  
proof that God loves you more, that he destines  
you to a greater holiness; and as he unites  
you to the cross, he will make you enter in a  
more intimate manner into the heart of Our  
Lord. So give thanks at all times.

Be on the look out if a thing is pleasant  
to you, if it is to your liking, if there is  
something for your own satisfaction; keep your-  
selves close to God, so that your soul may  
find God in all things. May this be your plea-  
sure, may this be your will, may this be for  
you the beginning and the end. Always have your  
eyes raised towards him who drew you by love,  
who wants to possess you in love and who wishes  
your soul to be so pure that he will not re-  
ceive it in heaven until after it has been pu-  
rified by the fires in Purgatory, of habits  
that are not sinful but imperfect.

Let us separate ourselves from created things even now, Sisters. The fire of Purgatory is more cruel than all the sufferings of the world. Why do we not accomplish here on earth, for love of Our Lord, this purification which is full of merit, when it is done through our own free will? Purgatory will without doubt take away the evil; but it will not give us one more degree of love. From the point of view of holiness, we will be what we are in leaving this world; but our purified soul will be capable of being among the inhabitants of the heavenly city, where nothing tainted can enter, where reigns love most pure, most holy, most perfect and where the virtues stripped of all rust, shine with the brightness that God wants to see in his saints.

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ON RELIGIOUS MODESTY: THE CUSTODY OF  
OUR EYES AND OF OUR LIPS IS A POWERFUL  
MEANS TO ADVANCE IN THE INTERIOR LIFE

August 22, 1880

We spoke last time of created things and of the nothingness of all these things considered in themselves. I would like to continue today the other side of this great question of the union of our heart with God.

We must understand that God is all, that we ought to turn all our thoughts, all our desires towards him: this is the basis of our religious vocation.

When one enters religion, it is in order to give oneself to God, to unite oneself to him as perfectly as possible. Why is it that

after a certain number of years in religion, one is not very advanced in union with God? What is the cause of this? It is an important thing to examine, and we must ask ourselves often: "What hinders this union with Jesus Christ for which I have entered religion?"

We must often look at the principles that one puts before novices, principles that they do not always understand and from which they do not always profit as they should. So, I am going to touch on seemingly elementary matters: religious modesty, for example. Among us, one is not asked for a constrained religious modesty; but nevertheless, religious modesty is required. We must enter into the principles of all spiritual authors who, all without exception, speak of the custody of the eyes, the custody of the lips, the custody of the heart, in a word, of the custody of the whole exterior. Without any doubt, on these principles rest the recommendations that novices are given about keeping the modesty of the eyes, of having them often lowered, of not raising them in the places of prayer and of silence. They do not always understand very well the reasons why this is asked of them; they do it, but not always; when they do it, they do not put their heart into it because they do not see its importance.

Certainly the custody of the eyes concerns first of all, everything which is not good. In convents it is extremely rare to find oneself in circumstances where one could see something evil; but we, religious, strive not only to avoid sin, we are tending towards perfection. We tend towards it every time we impose on ourselves exterior modesty of the eyes; we avoid looking at useless things, but this without constraint. You are not asked to turn your eyes away from the face of your Sisters who, on the contrary, could lead you to God; but when you



come and go, when you look from one side to the other, or turn back to see who is behind, all that is pure distraction. It is impossible that interior life, attention to prayer and to the presence of God agree with these distractions which one receives constantly through the eyes. St. John of the Cross said that the eyes are the doors through which the images of exterior things enter in us, and we must drive away these images in order to receive directly in our soul the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ. See how noble, important and serious are the reasons for the custody of the eyes, since all the mystics have called the custody of the eyes the key to a life of prayer.

Let us look up when it is useful for the service of God: we are constantly in this duty towards the children. It is necessary to look at them in order to know what they do; but we ought to have this recollection which results from attention to keeping the modesty of bearing, of not looking left and right, of effacing from the mind the images that could enter through the eyes, so as to have before one's gaze something holy and divine which has a reference to Jesus Christ.

In your meditations, you study him in order to imitate him. You meditate on the Holy Infancy, for example. Why are you not like a holy priest who said: "During the forty days that follow Christmas, I am always in the stable"? Why do we leave the stable? Why do we not stay there at the feet of the holy Child Jesus? You meditate on the Passion. Why are we not often on Calvary, following the Blessed Virgin like a great number of souls, associating ourselves with her anguish, with the disciples, with the Apostles? Let this be the object that our mind considers.

If you want to be in the way of union with God, your mind ought to gaze at something holy which recalls to you the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If you look at all the butterflies that are around, it is impossible for your mind to have the strength to fix itself on spiritual things.

I say this regarding the custody of the eyes; but the custody of the lips is much more important still. This prayer: "Set, O Lord, a guard at my mouth," (Ps. 140, 3) goes as far back as the Saints of the Old Testament, as far as the Prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit; it is from David. It is, therefore, not only today, nor yesterday, that it was recommended to keep guard over one's words. I said just now that we must not look at the butterflies which are around. One is accustomed in the world to speak quite like a butterfly that flies from flower to flower; one talks for the sake of talking, one says words without sense, one talks to tell always the same story. Are not the visits, the conversations of the persons of the world completely meaningless? It is like the noise of the mill and that prevents the spirit from remaining within itself. Leaving the world, one may have kept something of this habit. One must then make an effort to guard one's lips with regard to useless words; I would not say with regard to sinful words: a religious would naturally dread them.

Here, we do not ask you to write your examen; however, we have to make two examens a day. Have you thought of taking as the subject of your examen to see if any of your words came from a little passion, impatience, for example? Are there not a certain number of your words that come from impatience? Is it not true that following a movement of self love, of annoyance from an observation, of desire to be approved, one says words which proceed from one of these sources of pride, of touchiness, of self love?

They are not, I hope, sinful words, but they are imperfect words; and the bad element that one ought to destroy in the religious life flourishes instead of being extinguished.

When a thing annoys you very much, why show it to a talking? Why does one hear words of murmur, words of complaint, of ill-will or of quarrel, of retraction, as St. Chantal says? One extols oneself, one speaks of self. It is an everlasting subject. I have often told you the story of this poor man who had written a book. When he wanted to have it printed, he did not find enough "I's" and "me's" in the printing press, so much "I" and "me" recurred often. It is a joke, but everybody, some a little more, some a little less, have this interest.

to seek for the peace and the recreation a harmless joyfulness, available for our recreation. A conversation filled with good, holy things, not by preaching, but as St. Paul says, "fill your mind with everything that is noble, every-thing that is good and pure", (Phil. 4:8) all that is in the order of charity, of humility, of simplicity. How many interesting subjects there are for us who know the story of the Church, the history of the Church. There are many things which are holy and good in them-selves. If our conversation turns in this direction, it will be consoling, interesting, agreeable for others, as St. Teresa asks. In order to make oneself pleasing to others, it is necessary to detach oneself of all that is of self. Human nature is so made that the person

nality of the neighbor is always boring; you have experienced it as I have. One bears the personality of others, and one esteems a person boring in the measure that she is self-seeking.

It is necessary then to aspire to have a conversation which is good and consoling for others in order to fulfill well the precept of the Rule on recreation which says: "Let the Sisters take care not to bore one another." It is necessary that the recreation be a rest for self and for others and that the words rebound to the glory of God.

Do you see the difference? When you ought to speak let all your words be good, charitable, devoid of all the bad elements which, sooner or later lead to sin.

Outside of recreation, modesty of the eyes is recommended in order that your gaze be turned towards Jesus Christ; for the same reason, you are not permitted to speak words that are frivolous, that dissipate your mind: "A great talker will never become very spiritual," said St. Chantal, and I believe that this is true. A person who talks much will never be a soul taken up with holy things and wholly absorbed in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ. All that is said to a religious during her noviciate, but it is good to say it again to her sometimes. Because if a religious failed in it constantly and dissipated her mind by useless words, it would be difficult for her to advance in the life of prayer. God gives himself to us with an extreme generosity; in return, he demands certain sacrifices on our part. You are not asked for heroic, extraordinary things; you are asked to keep some religious modesty, attention to silence and to perfection of words when you are obliged to speak. Everybody can do it. Ask this grace from God and that of renewing yourself often in this.

## ON WATCHFULNESS OVER ONE'S HEART

August 29, 1880

I spoke to you last time of watchfulness over one's glances and words; but you understand well that the exterior expresses what is going on within. Each one of us knows how to say: that person, in her exterior, manifests pride, softness; she has a haughty look, an air of indolence. The exterior manifests what is in the heart and the words do it much more still, for Our Lord said: "A good man draws good things from his store of goodness." (Mat. 12:35)

The Rule of St. Augustine tells us: "Do not say that your intention is pure if your exterior is not modest," that is to say, that the attitude is regulated by the heart, by the thoughts, the sentiments, by all that comprises the interior man. In this way, let a religious of the Assumption always bear herself with modesty, frankness, good-will, humility, recollection, because in the interior of her heart, all is regulated, all is given to God, all is in conformity with the Gospel and with the different virtues which are recommended to us by our Rule.

From the custody of the eyes and of the lips, we must then come to the custody of the heart. It seems to me that it is absolutely necessary to remember, in the order of faith, the importance of the heart of man to the eyes of God Who possesses all perfection, or who better still is perfection himself; God, who in the unity of his nature and in the Trinity of Persons in whom it subsists, finds from all eternity the plenitude of knowledge and love, of happiness and joy. Why is God in need of man's heart and why does he attach so much importance to what goes on in it? In order to solve this question, it is necessary to recall what faith teaches us.



God made them such that we may see in them, with the intellectual power he has given us, his love, his gifts, a very imperfect image of him, and that from all things, we could rise up to him.

A child whose parents had taught from childhood to say always: "Thank You, my God" for all that she received, whether it was a toy, a piece of bread, a dress, a fruit, because she saw the hand of God through the hand of her parents, had been brought up well. That is what we ought to do always. Intellectual knowledge gives us the means to rise from all things to God, and to affirm that all we receive comes to us from God.

When God created man, he endowed him with the faculties which established in him all the perfections of his natural being. He added grace to these gifts of nature. Then man could know God not only through created beings but through grace. God was known and loved because he dwelt in the heart of man.

In order to be so known and loved, God had established a kind of relation which made man like a child of God, which united him to God, which gave him something like a ray from his own light. This grace was lost. Since then, every creature born on earth found himself descended to an inferior state, to a state of sin; he needed two things in order to be saved. First, he had to preserve the remembrance of the time when he had known God and thereby render him homage. Secondly, that he have faith in the promised Redeemer, through whom alone he was to be saved, and that with this faith and this love, he did good works on earth.

God in his goodness has deigned, in the Old Testament, to save those who had preserved something of the thought, of the knowledge of God, of faith and hope in the promised Redeemer.

This is the secret of God. In the garden of Eden God spoke with his creature; and on earth, he gave him the knowledge of an eternal, all-powerful God, knowledge that we find distorted in paganism. Therefore, God had wanted his creature to love him. "God's heart was grieved" say the Scriptures (Gen. 6,6) when his creature gave himself over entirely to sin. Then he wanted to wipe him from the earth, since he had not held his heart in what was good, in integrity, in justice. He sent the deluge in order to destroy all flesh. He must have attached much importance to the love of his creature since he struck him so grievously, so severely when his ungrateful creature despised his love.

The heart of God has therefore desired the heart of man. God made the heart of man capable of loving him and he expects from him, a love which ought to be one of the accidental glories of the divinity, and to which the heart of God attaches a great importance.

I would like to draw from this what concerns us. What I have said is but a prelude to what I have to say. St. Ignatius does this too. When he wants to talk of sin, he takes sin in general, he shows the punishment for the first sin, for the sin of the Angels, and then all the punishments which have struck those who sin.

I will say the same for the love of God. It is important for us to see that God, having done all he could to win the heart of man, is afflicted with a great sorrow, when the heart of man turns away from him. You will thus understand well that God watches over you and at each moment his gaze is fixed on your heart. He gazes at each one of you individually, he considers what you do with this faculty of knowledge and love that he has placed in you; what intellectual effort you make to conceive of this



perfect, eternal, sovereign, infinitely good God, whose perfections are his essence, whose goodness is his essence, whose beauty is his essence; he observes how you seek to love him above all things. It is necessary then not to waste a single moment. This is the only thought with which I will leave you today.

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ON WATCHFULNESS OVER ONE'S HEART  
(continued)

September 5, 1880

In speaking to you the last time on watchfulness over one's heart, I tried to make you understand that man here below was the only creature that could conceive the idea of goodness, of beauty, of power, of invisible holiness, of attaching oneself to it by a love of preference to all that is seen. I also recalled to you that here below, there are creatures who attach themselves to other creatures whom they believe to be ideally good, ideally beautiful, and which are not God; they attach themselves to them passionately to the extent of sacrificing themselves completely including their ideas, their opinions. I also said that there are creatures on earth who are attached to God whom they do not see, and have thus become this innumerable army of the saints that we venerate in heaven.

God created man in order to bestow grace on him immediately. Since the fall, man is born in a sinful state, ignorant, inclined to inferior things. The soul is wounded by sin and consequently, it is weak, less capable of attaching itself to invisible things than man before the fall.

If one compares the grace that Adam received, the grace that enlightened and sanctified him with the grace that restores us, which is more precious? In many passages of Scriptures, one sees that the grace which restores us is more precious than the grace which Adam received, because, in the final analysis, it is through this grace that we have Jesus Christ. That is why the Church says: "O felix culpa... O happy fault which won for us such a Redeemer."

Certainly, the first man could expect Jesus Christ; he could hope for him. But what difference there is between an expectation, a hope and the very possession of our Lord Jesus Christ who came on earth to give himself to us. It is true that we are born sinners; but hardly are we born than baptism effaces original sin and infuses in us faith, hope, charity. Grace informs our soul and supernaturalizes it; we become temples of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity descends in us. Happy the soul if this first grace is preserved in her always! happy is she if what makes God love the soul of a child and dwell in her heart is never lost; and if after the first light, the first dawn of grace, she remains faithful. Behold the true watchfulness over our heart.

I cannot help making you notice what a beautiful day it is to speak about watchfulness over the heart since it is the feast of the holy and immaculate Heart of Mary. Here is a heart always preserved by God, always sanctified, always increasing its treasure, always responding to grace by an ever greater love, and finally attaining the last degree of perfection by suffering, by sacrifice, by a very hard life which made the Blessed Virgin worthy to be called Queen of Martyrs. Mary arrived at the summit of all perfection, above all the Angels and the Saints by the purity and fidelity of her immaculate heart.

We ought to follow her on this way. When our spirit is roused, we learn to know God, to know Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, descended on earth in order to save us. He has left us his word, his mysteries and his sacraments to sanctify us, his Church which teaches us and leads us. But it happens that we sin, so Our Lord has prepared for the sinful soul the sacrament of Penance. Good will suffice for the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ to be poured out in our soul, giving it grace. Then we are nourished by the very flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We receive Our Lord who comes to take possession of our heart by his flesh, by his blood, by his sacrifice; because the sacrifice of the Mass where the blood of Our Lord is shed is the same sacrifice as that of Calvary.

For us, religious, there is still something more. One day, God called us to him to be consecrated to him, and we can say: "I have the happiness of belonging to God, to be a virgin; I am consecrated to God, I have chosen him. I have left all for him." We must now see what obligations result from this.

Let us take for instance St. Catherine of Sienna. They do not want her to belong to Jesus Christ; her parents oppose becoming a religious. Well, she is happy to be everybody's servant, she is happy to remain hidden under the stairs; and when they no longer want to leave her in this solitude, she is happy to do all the work of the house, provided she is not obliged to accept an earthly marriage. She dwells in the interior cell that she has made for herself in the depths of her heart and she always finds the divine Spouse therein.

God has done much for us. In the natural order, he made us half-angels and half-creatures of the earth. There is something of an angel in

us: the possibility of knowing God, of honoring and glorifying him. All that comes from above, all that prompts us to say: "We bless You, Lord, we adore You, we praise You, we give You thanks," as it is said in the "Gloria", all this is proper to the angels, all this is not the prerogative of inferior creatures; and that is why we ask ceaselessly to be united with the Angels in order to sing with them: "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus."

As there is something of an angel in us, there is equally something of an inferior creature; and as all human temptations can come our way, we have to keep what is angelic and not to allow the least place to what is of our animal nature. I do not speak of ugly matters. But it is proper to the animal to love its master or all other creatures which give it its food, to love because it finds sympathy; this is not proper to the angel. The natural attraction which inclines us towards ourselves, this attraction is not supernatural, it is not divine it does not even belong to the higher part of our nature.

A man said that in charity, which is the most noble of sentiments, there are two things: to love and to be loved. To love, to devote oneself to others, to wish their good, to wish it to all, one never goes to excess in this point; but to be loved, it is from there that all imperfections, all miseries come. As few persons in their relations with creatures content themselves to love them without seeking anything for themselves and only because God has placed in them his image, we must guard our heart toward creatures, in such a way that they do not preoccupy us, they do not absorb our interest and we do not seek in them a selfish pleasure.

But we must above all guard our heart toward

ourselves. A creature who is not yet near God loves most herself. In one way or the other, she falls back continually on herself, with regard to her health, her pleasure, her affections, her different quests. However, if we want to keep our heart for God, to imitate the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, it is necessary that nothing in our heart be for us. St. Francis of Sales said: "If I knew that in my heart there would be a single fiber which were not for God, I would uproot it right away, even though it would be stained by blood." See by that how all the fibers of the heart ought to be for God.

We must guard our heart with regard to creatures, with regard to oneself and with regard to everything which can capture it on earth. It is said that St. Dositheus was attached to a knife. This seems extraordinary for such a mortified saint; but it is claimed that he could only advance in perfection when he had given up this knife. See how one can hold on to a little thing.

Madame Louise de France, who perhaps will be canonized some day, and who had been holy enough for us to follow her example, said that she herself began to walk more firmly in the service of God when she lost her Mistress of Novices who had initiated her in the service of God, on whom she relied and who seemed to be her support.

See how jealous God is, how he wants absolutely to detach our heart from all things, to separate it from all things and to keep it perfectly. Our Lord Jesus Christ said to his Apostles: "It is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate will not come to you." (Jn.16,7) The Apostles could not receive the Holy Spirit as long as they knew Our Lord in human fashion,

as long as they enjoyed his presence. Sacrifice was necessary so that the Apostles would be led to the possession of Jesus Christ by faith, in order that the Holy Spirit would come to fill them with his presence and his light. I do not wish to say by that, that you ought to keep your heart from Our Lord. We do not enjoy his human presence; it is only through faith, through prayer and the sacraments, through what is invisible to human eyes, that we possess him. You can therefore turn your heart towards Our Lord; you can let yourself go in this direction with an ardent impetuosity, because you will never love him enough, you could never sufficiently attach yourself to him.

One of the consoling points of view for us who live close to Our Lord is that we know Our Lord, we know his words, the sentiments of his heart, his desires. He himself said: "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart." It is easy for us to imitate him. It is true that we must want this, but after all, we know what he loved, what he called blessed. We do not know the features of his face; but we can conceive for ourselves some idea of his appearance, his simplicity, his goodness.

A holy soul asked Our Lord in the secret of her soul: "Lord, what have you to tell me? I lay my soul open to you;" and Our Lord answered her: "I am goodness itself." That is true, what a soul has most need of to know and understand is that Our Lord is goodness itself. "I am goodness," Our Lord replies to earnest prayer. Each one of you ardently desires something, at least I hope so. Each one of you asks either a greater love, or a greater faith or surely, holiness and the virtue that you need most. Each one has some special needs that she states to Our Lord. If you state them with

such ardour, if you tell him: "Lord, give me a heart pure and without stain, give me what I need most:" he will hear you because he feels a very warm heart to give.

In the Gospel, there are some words which ought to inspire much confidence, when one asks something from Our Lord: "What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread, or hand him a snake instead of a fish? If you then who are evil know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for him." (L. 11, 13-14) The most precious bread that we could ask for is the virtue of faith. One never has enough of it. We need to ask for the love of God, the religious spirit, perfect obedience, poverty which is generous and despoiler of all, chastity of heart that is no feeling which is not for Jesus Christ to remain there. To all that, Our Lord will reply: "Trust in me, I am goodness. When someone calls, I always come, I am goodness; when someone asks for Me, I am always ready to give with infinite goodness. If you call, I myself will keep your heart."

It is difficult to keep one's heart from all stain, from all weakness, from all attachment, from all self-seeking, from all self-love, from the desire to be successful, to be loved and esteemed; but love makes one desire it, love makes one work for it, because Scripture says: "Love is strong as Death, relentless jealousy as Sheol." Judge how the jealousy of love is to be compared to that of Sheol which, as long as it holds something, never lets it go. Love does not let it go after possession of a heart: it does not let it go: it does not allow it to go to other places. Some saints complained to Our Lord about his attitude as love. St. Catherine of Genoa told him: "Lord, how exalted you are, you ask me for so many things!".

This is not surprising; he was demanding much of this saint, because she was in intimate terms with Jesus Christ and called by him to a great purity of love.

I would like to end and yet there is something that I cannot keep myself from telling you. God is in us and he lives in man in three ways. First, by his essence. he is in us and we in him; he dwells in the most intimate part of ourselves in order to make us exist. That is true of every creature, even of evil men.

Secondly, he dwells in us by his grace. According to spiritual authors, we can never be absolutely sure of being in the grace of God. We believe to be in it when we communicate; and when we have a stain, we seek to wash it by the sacrament of Penance; we seek to excite in ourselves a lively contrition that effaces all the stains contracted by failing in some virtue; therefore we can believe that Our Lord dwells in us by his spirit. God dwells with joy in the souls of the just, of those who are in a state of grace. The soul of the just is a dwelling which is pleasing to him and this is what makes him say: "My delights are to be with the sons of men." (Prov. 8,31) He takes pleasure in instructing the soul, guiding it, enlightening it to set it on fire. You can ask Our Lord to do that in you, to render his presence more intimate in your heart. He is there, but his splendor, his lights are still veiled, because our heart is not a very pure crystal through which God can shine.

You must then purify your heart, detach it from earthly things, enter within yourself in adoration in order to find



God who lives in it and who wants to sanctify you. You must put yourself before Jesus Christ, infinite goodness who can do nothing in you if you are outside yourself, if you live in an atmosphere that surrounds you. It is for this reason that Holy Scripture says: "Sinners, enter within your heart;" (Is.46,3) Find in it Jesus Christ because "the kingdom of God is within you." (Lk.15,21)

Finally, the masters of the spiritual life say that there is a third habitation of Our Lord in the soul. There is something which gives more joy to Jesus Christ, which renders his dwelling in the soul more agreeable: it is to dwell in a soul entirely given to the spiritual life. She has renounced everything, she is a consecrated virgin, given to Jesus Christ by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and she has nothing on earth dearer than Jesus Christ. This is a certain habitation of grace, but grace full of tenderness. Jesus Christ showers upon her more gifts to purify her more. He can present these sometimes under a form of purification and of sacrifice.

The Blessed Virgin was very holy and perfect when she was led to Calvary. We must not believe that the presence of Our Lord is always expressed by consolation; it is often by sacrifice and by the efforts that he asks of us, in order to attain the virtues to which his grace invites us. Because Jesus Christ wants you to be holy, he wants to cut again and again all the links which still bind you, to purify and sanctify you more and lead you finally to Heaven.

Certainly St. Cecilia was very holy, when she passed through that terrible

cession, when she saw Valerian die, her brother rather than her bridegroom, and Tiburtius, Valerian's brother. She was sustained by God, but it is by the courage, the generosity, and the martyr's that she entirely purified her soul.

Therefore, in order to keep your heart pure, be inwardly attentive to the presence of Jesus Christ within you. First of all to his presence by essence. You will make this presence more intimate, more true, because you will devote yourself to the spiritual life: and thus Our Lord will dwell with you with greater joy because he will find you more docile, more pure, more faithful to your vows, to your rule, more recollected, more charitable with regard to your neighbor, more humble and more detached with regard to yourselves. This is the joy that you are called to give Jesus Christ.

I have called this third presence, the presence of perfection because it is the presence that makes the spouse dwell with the bridegroom, that makes the handmaid pleasing to God. Let us ask this grace from Our Lord through the Blessed Virgin, desire it always, never be discouraged. Without doubt, we are of little account, very low in the spiritual life. We must humble ourselves and we have matter for that. Provided we are faithful, Our Lord will be pleased with our poverty, with our humility; because when it pleased God to choose a soul to bestow on it so many gifts, he knew well that he had chosen a poor little creature, capable of great weakness. The grace will not of her own power stay away.

FEAST OF THE MATERNITY OF OUR LADY  
October 10, 1880

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS OUR MODEL IN THE  
LOVE AND IMITATION OF OUR LORD

A reading from the Rule: Of the requirements needed in order to enter the Congregation.- "The Sisters must always remember not to say or do anything that could not have been said or done by Our divine Lord or his Blessed Mother."

What has just been read to you, my dear Sisters, is a rule of great perfection, since one should find that all our actions are such that they could have been done by Our Lord or Our Lady. This presupposes that there is no self-seeking in what we do but that our dealings are always guided by the religious spirit, by our love for Our Lord and Our Lady.

We celebrate today the feast of the Maternity of Our Lady. It is a great joy for her daughters to talk about her from time to time; and St. Bernard says that it is good to try to talk about her even if we cannot do it as she deserves. We can never speak well enough about so much virtue, dignity, natural and supernatural perfections; however it is always good to do what is within our power, to try to speak about her and thus show her our love. You have heard this morning the beautiful liturgy of the Mass. In the Office of the Maternity, the Church recalls all the words in the Sapiential Books which are applicable to Our Lady. The literal meaning refers of course to Our Lord. It is he, the Word of God, Uncreated Wisdom, who can say: "Before all ages, in the beginning, the Lord created me...

When he established the heavens, then was I by his side, a master craftsman, delighting him day after day, at play everywhere in his world." (Prov.8,3) However, the Church applies these words not only to the Divine Word but to Our Lady as well. How can this be? It is because in the plan of the Incarnation, this mystery which was to give God all honor and glory, through which every creature goes back to God, Our Lady is related to Our Lord, as being the first after him in the divine thought. From all ages in the mind of God, Jesus and Mary were the object and the model of the world, the reason for which God created it.

We can say this even if we have to admit that the mystery of the Incarnation was brought about by the fall of man; for in God's foreknowledge, Adam's fall was known like the rest, and the mystery of reparation was part of the divine plan. The other point of view is simpler. The world was created for Jesus Christ and Our Lady, and through Jesus Christ it was to return to God. Even without sin, in the divine plan everything returns to God through Jesus Christ and necessarily through Our Lady who is the intermediary through whom Jesus Christ has been given to us. It is of her that it is said: "For the man who finds me, finds life. Happy the man who day after day watches at my gates, listening to me." (Prov.8, 34-35)

You see how encouraging these words are for the mission we have in this world of making Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary known. All our actions should have this aim. Our life is spent between prayer and action.

Through prayer, we try to know Our Lord, we enter into him and let our soul

be illumined by his light.

Through education we make him known to the world. It is not only by such and such counsel, or by such and such lessons that we make him known, but by the totality of the work that we have to do for the children under our care. They come to us hardly knowing Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. We should try to make of them true Christians modeled after Jesus and Mary.

With this, I go back to the words read to you from the Rule. What is most important in our apostolic work? It is the care taken not to say or do anything that could not have been said or done by Our divine Lord or His Blessed Mother. If we are faithful to this rule whatever be the work we do in the house; if at the kitchen, one serves with humility and charity; if in one's supervision, one is self possessed and acts as a perfect religious; if while teaching, one brings a spirit of faith, simplicity, humility, the children will be able to see everywhere people whose actions are such that they could have been done by Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin; people whose words are not unworthy of children of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin; for we spouses of Jesus Christ and daughters of Our Lady. Let us ask for this grace today; let us have often before our eyes Our Lady holding in her arms the Child Jesus, so beautiful, so gentle, so loving.

Holy Church loves to put before our eyes the picture of Jesus in Our Lady's arms. She carries him and he carries the world. This is very true. In his little hands, gentle, beautiful and gracious, the Child Jesus holds the world and he holds us too. Everyday we say to God: Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Well then, today let us commend ourselves frequently to his little hands that are divine, so pure, so sweet, so holy, where we can place all our destiny.

There is another passage of the Scriptures which I have often mentioned to you: "As the eyes of a servant are fixed on the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are fixed on the Lord our God." (Ps.122,2) Have your eyes fixed on the hands of the Child Jesus, picture to yourselves that in these hands your destiny is placed, your salvation, your perfection, your future, your past, the forgiveness of your sins, and everything you may need. From these lovable and adorable little hands, Jesus wants to shower on you his most precious graces, and if he takes you entirely in his hands, it is in order to save you for all eternity. I have no fear encouraging you to this devotion.

The Father who gave us our retreat said that one of his brothers used to spend long hours contemplating the cap of the Child Jesus; for me I would rather contemplate the divine hands of this little Child who carries the world and say to myself, "I hope he holds my soul, my destiny, my desires and all my needs." Later Jesus worked with his hands, hands which are the object of great respect and devotion. When one thinks of it, since he was 12 up to the age of 30, Jesus gave himself to a humble, arduous and continuous work. Later on these same hands consecrated for us the Holy Eucharist. Everyday we repeat in the Canon of the Mass, "Jesus, having taken the bread into his holy and venerable hands, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples." Everytime we celebrate the Mass it is the hand of Jesus that stretches over the altar. These divine hands were nailed to the Cross and from hence flowed the blood of our Redemption.

AGENCE DE L'ASSOMPTION  
17, rue de l'Assomption  
75016 PARIS

EXPLANATION OF THE EVANGELICAL  
PASSAGE CONCERNING THE USE OF TALENTS

October 17, 1880

It is rather difficult not to worry about the present situation (persecutions) and speak of other things; however I decided to speak to you about the Gospel for the feast of Confessors which we so often read. It is the parable of the master who, before leaving for a journey, entrusts his servants with a certain amount of money and after a while comes back and asks for an account of each of the talents received. According to St. Gregory, this gospel is so simple that it needs not too much of an explanation; but it is important that we think often of it, and it is for this reason that the Church places it before our eyes at every feast of Confessors. I have always been surprised to see that according to the explanation given by St. Gregory, the five talents are taken as something less important than the two talents, because the two talents stand for intelligence and work. Putting aside this consideration I will take the five talents as representing the faculties we have received from God: intellect, will, memory, and speaking to women, I would say, the heart too. I know well enough, that the heart should follow the will, be united to it and that in philosophical speculation it is placed in the same category as the will. But it is not so for us. Aside from the will, there are the affections, there is something tender and profound which is called the heart. Our body and all its senses, everything has been given to us by God. If any one among you thinks she has a greater intelligence, a better memory than others, a stronger will, a heart capable of loving, in short anything good in itself,



she should think also of the greater obligation she has of rendering an account of all that she has received. That is what Holy Mother Church wants to remind us of by this Gospel; for there is nothing that we have received which God has not given us and of which he will demand from us an exact account.

Up to now what have we done with our intelligence? Have we used it for good and holy things, from the time that we came to this world? And can we say that from now on we will make good use of it by applying it to things concerning the kingdom of God? The intellect is used not only for studies, but also for prayer; at meditation one makes use of the intellect in order to understand the divine mysteries. A negligent, lazy person whose mind is filled with a thousand vain thoughts, who is continually self-centered, is not making use of her intellect during prayer in order to understand the mysteries of Our Lord and draw from them the practical applications for her conduct. I do not mean only by meditation, for there are persons - and I wish you would all be among them - whom Our Lord fills with his love and presence in such a way, that they hardly have time for considerations. This happens at times in the beginning of religious life, when God wants to draw a soul to himself; sometimes however this happens at the end of our lives, when God has taken full possession of the heart and the will.

When meditation is spent in this way, it is a good thing; you should remain in this disposition as long as Our Lord makes you feel his grace. But during the day towards what is your intellect directed? Is it directed towards the things of God in order to know and understand them better, or to the work entrusted to us in order to accomplish it to the best of our ability for God?

Reverend Mr. Brewster said:

Things should be accepted in relation to their end; but what is their end? It is the greater glory of God, the service to the Congregation, obedience, the will of God. Things are often accepted not for their end but for our own sake. For example you want to study such and such a subject which is of no use at all in the Congregation: you would like such and such a kind of work or occupation: in all these things you are just seeking self: and you should never substitute yourself as an end when God alone should be the aim of our lives.

When God will ask an account of the use you have made of your intellect, what will you answer? One will say: "I loved music, so I entertained myself playing piano all day long." Another will say: "From 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. I examined my conscience." And Our Lord will answer her: "I have not given you your intelligence just for that, you have spent the day very badly." Another one will say: "I read many spiritual books which I really enjoyed." "Were you obliged to do so?" "No, I asked for it." For another her answer will be: "I preached lengthily to the children, and I did them a great deal of good." "Were you given this responsibility?" "No, on the contrary, they wanted me to keep quiet." I know of people who could say they have made use of their intelligence, making up wonderful little stories in their mind.

Let us see what use we have made of our faculties and to begin with, let us examine specially what use we have made of our intellect and the account we have to render God. He wants the talent received to bring forth interest and at the same time produce another talent for his glory, his service, the sanctification of souls, the good of the Congregation, the spirit of regularity and perfection in everything. It is almost

...the perfect model of all the graces she received...

Picture Our Lady. St. Ambrose says, as the perfect model of consecrated souls, of virgins of all times. Look at her life: her early childhood, her life as a virgin, her life as a mother. She had the use of reason from the moment of her conception and from that instant her intelligence was totally dedicated to God. In the temple her perfection in her obedience, in her charity, in her work! It is not said that the Blessed Virgin ever preached to the other young maidens who were her companions; but she did preach by words, by her perfect humility, by the purity of her life, by the simplicity of her intentions, by her uninterrupted prayer. She used her intelligence too in studying the law of God; she knew the Scriptures and her spirit pondered on them.

Afterwards, in her poor household at Nazareth, she was perfect when cooking, sweeping the little house which was the home of the holy family, doing everything St. Joseph told her to do, giving orders to the Child Jesus. That certainly was an easy education, but Our Lady always saw the order of Divine Providence. Whether in Bethlehem, at Nazareth or in Egypt, her intellect was always occupied with God, and she did all the tasks of a poor worker's wife with a perfection never equalled.

Later on during the public life of Our Lord, she was perfect, hidden when he wanted it

so; perfect in following him, when he allowed her to do so; perfect at the foot of the Cross, when she contemplated the book which contains all science; perfect when after the death of her divine Son she remained with St. John; perfect in the Cenacle where she persevered in prayer and in charity; perfect when she was a consolation to everyone, remaining in the humility of an obscure and hidden life in order to be forever the model of Christian women.

Let us ask her in honor of her purity to help us serve God with great perfection by the use of everything he has given us. You know the prayer of St. Ignatius: "Lord you have given me everything, my body, my senses, my intellect, my will. I give them back to you with entire liberty; give me only your grace and your love and that will be enough for me." Now more than ever, one has to be ardent and generous in God's service. We are passing through crucial events which may well be called hours of darkness. If Our Lord does not find consolation in religious houses, if he does not find souls completely dedicated to him, where can he find refuge? His churches are taken away from him; they close the places for public worship where people of the world usually went to renew and purify themselves; he must find refuge and consolation in our hearts through our fidelity, our fervor, the zeal for our perfection and the perfection of the community. But remember that in order to work for the perfection of others, we should like Our Lady preach by example and start by making ourselves perfect in everything.

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Sunday, October 24, 1880

EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL ON THE TALENTS  
ON THE USE OF THE WILL

I spoke to you the other day of the five talents of which rigorous account will be required from us by Our Lord, when at the end of our life he will come to judge us. We have spoken of the intellect, which, for man, is the first of the talents: let me speak to you today of the will.

What a talent, what power is the will! It is the mighty weapon with which we can serve God, do all for God, always fulfill our duty. Our vocation as Christians and as religious invariably binds us to duty, - but duty is a word that is cold and dry, - let us rather say, to the will of God, manifested in all his laws, and for a religious, in all her rules, in all that concerns the vows which she has made. Who has constantly made use of her will to always do what pleases God, to really accomplish her Rule, to really follow all the inspirations of God, to really do all that pertains to the duty of a religious?

The word duty is sometimes taken in a purely human sense; but the duty of a religious is a constant fidelity which she cannot have but with the help of a very firm will. It is by the weakness of the will that one falls into all the irregularities which result from the ill use of this faculty. Let us take, if you wish, self will. Do you think it is a strength? It is a weakness. It is will that has no other aim than itself. To use all of one's strength, to be obstinate with all the energy that one has, in a thing which has for beginning or end our honor, our well being, our caprice, our taste, our choice, in short ourselves: this is a weakness; for instead of having the strength to do always what is good,

one uses one's energy to leave what is good and go to what is wrong.

What is even more common today is not having any will. How many persons, having resolved to walk along one way, do not know how to set their will there! One treads at the same time on two ways. If one is on the road of perfection, of the counsels, of holiness, the will yields to all that comes its way. One is not determined, one has not taken in an energetic manner the side of God. One would like to be perfect; but such an employment, such a difficulty, in short fifty things prevent us from it. There seems to be cotton wool in the wills of today. It is a sort of weakness, a cowardice, a powerlessness that prevents one from being self-determined in an energetic manner. Taking a way as perfect as that of the religious life, one does not give oneself to it entirely.

The will, it is often said, is a blind force, because it is determined by the intellect. We have seen that it is necessary to use one's intellect to know God and all that God wishes us to do. But the will is further determined by love. Philosophers in general, make of the will and of love but one faculty. It is not easy in speaking of perfection to put the two things together; for in reality, in love, there is a certain delicacy, there is something special which is not the will. I know well that the will is determined by love, and this is what makes it incomprehensible that we do not have a strong will to serve God, since the love of God should be above all other loves.

As Christians, we must say every day: "My God, I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength above all things." This is but the simple duty of a Christian: understand well then how love should perfect itself in us who are in a higher state. The desire of

pleasing God, of doing his will, of serving him, of procuring his glory, should be in proportion to the love which should grow every day in the heart of a religious. It is then with the help of knowledge and of love that the will makes decisions, but it is not love which determines caprice and self-love; it is not love which develops this kind of cowardice which makes one lack a firm will to serve God, lets herself be drawn gradually by all the movements of nature. One is fervent if God sends consolation: lukewarm of darkness follows: in truth, without a strong will to serve God always.

Now, will God ask from us an account of our will? He certainly will, for he has given us this faculty to serve him. There is not one among us who does not have, with the aid of grace, the strength to attach herself to the good that God shows us; there is not one who will be deprived of this strength necessary for advancing in virtue. The day we made our vows, we made the most powerful and the most magnificent act of the will which can ever be made. Since then, our will no longer belongs to us; that is to say, it is ours to obey, to be poor, to be perfect; but it is no longer ours to take it back, to put it to some other use. You know full well that the greatest act of the will is obedience. To obey demands a will that is always faithful, always submissive, always strong to make the love of God pass over love of self, and this is why obedience is so great in the eyes of God.

Let us think of the account we will have to give of our will. Let us seek how we can employ the fidelity of our will to his service; and then let us look at our life, let us examine if we apply all our will to do what should be done, with care, with diligence, without letting ourselves be guided by our own views, our own judgment. Let us be guided by faith,

by the Gospel, 1. the Rule, by obedience, 2. humility, by charity, 3. the virtues which God commands of us, by all that is taught us to be in the perfect life, and so by all the personal ideas that we can have of perfection.

St. Francis de Sales said in a charming manner in making allusion to the statue that Michel placed in David's bed to withdraw him from his concubines, that perfection is unfortunate in being claimed according to each one's inclination. And that is a big mistake, he adds, for perfection should not be clothed with the garb which it pleases us to give it, but with charity, obedience, immolation, sacrifice. Such are the garments of perfection, and one should not want to give it any other. For us religious, our perfection lies in the practice of our rules and of our vows. A great pope said: "Without any miracle and without any other testimony, I will canonize any religious who will have observed all the points of her rule and obeyed perfectly all her life." This is what God asks of us, let us put in this all the strength of our will.

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Sunday October 31, 1880

# EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL ON THE TALENTS ON THE USE THAT WE SHOULD MAKE OF OUR HEART

When explaining to you the Gospel of the five talents, I spoke of the three powers which we have been given: the will, the memory, the intellect; nevertheless, I have considered separately in my explanation the heart and the will, even though the will is considered in general as coming from the heart. For us women, the heart is a faculty so rich, so important, that it is necessary to appreciate the account we have to give of it to God. Let us then speak of the heart.

What use have we made of our heart? This is the question which we should first ask; for a day will come when God will ask us what are the fruits produced by the talents which he has given us; a day will come when we will have to give an account of the use which we will have made of this magnificent faculty which is the heart. Have we made it worthy of God? Have we purified it, embellished it? The heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the immaculate and unstained heart of the Blessed Virgin, are the models on which we should mould our heart; the heart of Mary above all, for it is the heart of a simple creature.

The first quality the heart should have is purity, and one should work all one's life to acquire this purity; for one should not believe that a pure heart is only that which is separated from all sin against the sixth commandment. It is a heart which has no stain, no affection and no attachment to the least thing which can offend God. St. Augustine said that pride soils the heart of a virgin as much as the sin which one need not even mention among us. Pride, he said, prepares the virgin for her fall and stains her heart. Take in succession all the capital sins

The heart is not pure if there remains something of other in it. If we were pure heart, some heart which is not according to God, something which we do not strip ourselves of and which does not come up to the grandeur of the gift which our Lord gives us when he comes to us in holy communion. It is the heart of God which unites itself to us in the sacrament of love: and for our heart to be worthy of him, we must all our life work at purifying it; for we are born in sin and we have been conceived in iniquity. (Ps.50)

The first thing necessary to acquire purity of heart is then to purify it by humility, by detachment from self and all created things. You do understand that the heart is not pure, when one loves with God something which God does not want us to love. God has not told us to love ourselves. On the contrary, he expressly tells us to hate ourselves, to renounce ourselves: "Anyone who loves his life, loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (Mt. XII,25)

Self-contempt, self-sacrifice, is the characteristic mark of all the saints. You can see this in all the legends that you read in the Office: perhaps there is not a single one of them who was not remarkable for his self-contempt. It is the same thing in regard to creatures; for sometimes it is in relation to oneself that one loves a creature. If you love a creature, as is said in our Rule, because it is an image of God, if you love it in order to lead it to God, in the great gift of your lives, all all the virtues which are effected is good. But if you love in the creature, who is soft and sensitive and attached, because of the need of clinging to it, if you love yourself in it, if through it you love yourself, then it is a detour, a detour from God, a detour from the path of holiness, a detour from the path of holiness, a detour from the path of holiness.

God in it. That is why St. Francis de Sales said: "If I saw in my heart a single fiber which would not be for God, I would tear it out, even if I were to bleed." And it is in this sense that Our Lord said: "If your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away: it is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes to be thrown into hell. If your foot or hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life crippled or lame, than to have two hands and two feet and be thrown into eternal fire." (Matt. XVIII, 9) And St. Bernard adds: "If anyone is dear to you as your eye, your foot, or your hand, but is an object of scandal to you, you should separate yourself from him, with all the courage and strength that mark the words of Our Lord."

The first thing for the heart to bear fruit is therefore to purify it from all attachments, all stain, all sin, all inclination to sin, all disorderly affection, all self-love, all self-seeking. You will perhaps tell me that it is very difficult; and yet what I have told you is not only proper to religious, it is a lesson of Christian life. The Gospel of the five talents is not only proposed to religious, but to all Christians. What I have just told you: "If your eye scandalizes you..." is for everybody. Purity of heart which admits no affection for venial sin is for everybody, but perhaps, not as absolute as the rest. It is certain that a Christian just fulfilling his Easter obligation, even going to communion every month, refraining from all mortal sin, but continually falling into venial sin, will be saved. That is certain; but what a terrible purgatory he will have to go through before reaching heaven! On the other hand, it is absolutely certain, and it is the doctrine of all theologians, that a Christian

who keeps the habit of venial sin is not fit for frequent communion. That is why if purity of heart is necessary for a religious, it is also necessary for every Christian who is a bit fervent, who works at his sanctification, and who desires to go frequently to the sacraments.

One should not say that this condition is too hard. It is very mild. Happy are we, if in doing this, we would be worthy of Our Lord making his dwelling in our heart and finding his pleasure there. Happy are we if in doing this we can prepare for Our Lord, to make up for the churches from which he is driven out, places where he no longer receives homage, a heart pure and generous where he finds consolation and repose.

I say, a heart pure and generous; for the heart is not pure, if it is not generous. For the heart to be generous, it must respond to all the demands of God, to all the attractions of grace, to all the insights of perfection, for one should clearly see what God demands before embracing it, so as not to be surprised when one does not see it; but when one sees it, one should give to God all that he asks. If God asks for more mortification, for more humility, for more charity, one should make the effort to give it to him. If God asks with regard to neighbor more support, more patience, in such and such a thing which is the ordeal of our life; if he asks for more prayer, more recollection, or such and such an effort of virtue, we should not refuse him.

The generous heart is that which always gives to God all that he asks, which sacrifices itself generously, which refuses nothing. In the world, does one esteem a heart that is not generous? It is then not surprising that God expects from us this generosity with purity. Since a Sister

asked me what should one do to make one's will strong, I would say that it is to make one's heart generous. It is the will and the heart united to give to God at every moment, at every hour, all that one should give him. It is also conscience saying: "I have promised to God, I have given him that which he asked me when I bound myself by the vows to follow the Rule: now I want to give him all by my fervor. I will hold fast, without ceasing, to where honor is, there where nobility is, where firmness is. I will use all the strength of my soul to serve God with a generous will and consequently, with an upright heart.

To purity and generosity, I will add fidelity. It is one of the qualities attributed to the Blessed Virgin, since the Church proclaims her **VIRGO FIDELIS**. Fidelity is identified with all that I have just said. It is the firm will to give to God all that he asks, that makes the virgin very faithful; and God expects from his spouse fidelity in everything, fidelity in little things, fidelity in great things, fidelity in this tender, constant love, which she should have for Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did I, for a moment separate the heart from the will? It is because in the heart of a virgin, there are treasures of love, of tenderness, of fidelity. Why would not these treasures be for God? Why should not all this tenderness, all this delicacy be for God?

It is related in the life of St. Gertrude that one day she took the crucifix in her hands and, detaching the nails which held Our Lord to the Cross, she covered with tears, with kisses and with perfume all the wounds of the Savior, healing them in some way.... You are not asked for this exterior act of tenderness; but at least, let your heart be occupied with consoling Our Lord by acts of profound tenderness. Adore

his wounds, his broken limbs, his divine hands, his sacred feet. Love the Blessed Virgin who is his throne, his dwelling, the only place on earth where Our Lord found his real repose and his real joy. You are capable of tenderness: direct this tenderness towards your Spouse, and at the same time that you are striving to make your heart pure and generous make it tender, devoted, binding it to Our Lord. Refer to him all the thoughts all the tenderness that you can possibly have. You see him suffer for you, show him likewise your love and your gratitude; and if at times it happens to you to have before your eyes the remembrance of a great suffering; if you recall the anguish or the agony of a person who was dear to you; if you remember having seen a poor person, broken, unhappy, recall the sufferings of Our Lord. That will help you to have more charity, for you will see God in the creature and that will also bring you close to Our Lord. You will see him in his anguish, you will picture to yourself the pain in his heart, the pain in his body, you will follow all the painful movements which must have been caused in this agony on the cross, the most painful of all agonies, for there was nothing to soothe it and relieve it.

This is what I thought I would tell you to induce you to give to Our Lord the hundredfold that he expects from you. There are people who give one per cent: it is already a lot, and Our Lord contents himself with that; but we religious, we are called to something more, we are called to give thirty fold and a hundred fold. Let us try to bear much fruit in a great love of God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, in great purity, in great tenderness, in great fidelity, in great generosity. Let us try to develop in us all the qualities in the heart of a virgin, spouse of Jesus Christ, so that on the day of eternal reward, we should be able to give a hundred fold, if God gives us the grace.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
 PREPARING FOR OUR LORD'S COMING  
 BY PURITY OF HEART  
 December 5, 1880

Every year, during Advent, when we recite the Divine Office, so full of the desires of the ancient world for the coming of the Messiah, we should have in our souls the same dispositions, calling Jesus with great longing.

Our Lord dwells in our souls; you receive him in holy communion, you are consecrated to him, but how fully does he live in your heart? Is he the only master? Should he not come to you in a certain newness of heart? He ardently desires to possess more fully your soul. It is a thing of beauty in his eyes, since it is the most perfect of all things created, being endowed with the power to reflect his image. He can fill it with himself, and he yearns to do so.

When he came to earth, his purpose was to redeem souls with his blood, since they are the object of his love and his desire. Can you really say that Our Lord is the absolute master of your soul, and that there is nothing in your heart which is not his? This is what you have to strive for during Advent? calling Jesus with the ardour of your desire.

Father d'Alzon used to say when he was young: "My ever-ruling thought is this: if I put my hands together, and there is between them a sheet of paper, they are not perfectly together. In the same way, if there is the least thing between my soul and God, I am not perfectly united to him, and all my efforts, my desire, are to remove what prevents me from being united to God". Do this, and get rid of anything in your soul that takes the place which should belong to Jesus.

Let nothing stand between you and Our Lord: nothing created, but specially nothing of self, of your desires, your inclinations, your ways, nothing of the past, stirrings of the present or thoughts of the morrow, nothing which, standing between you and God, prevents a perfect union of your soul to God.

I often say that what we must seek in the religious life is love of God, perfection, union with God. But this too is what every soul needs to go directly to God after death. If there is anything between the soul and God at that moment, it has to be cleansed by the fire of purgatory. We have not perhaps a realistic enough idea of what this fire of purgatory is, and that is why we run the risk of suffering it, to enjoy some paltry satisfaction. If we knew that we should go through a raging fire in order to have it, we certainly would not seek it. Nevertheless, what would this temporary suffering be compared to the sufferings of purgatory? Any soul who still hesitates to break its bonds, must use every means to free herself and give herself wholly to God. Advent is a propitious time for this effort. The Church continually puts on our lips the words: "Send victory like a dew, you heavens, and let the clouds rain it down". (Is. 45,8) Also: "Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, let every cliff become a plain" (Is. 40,4), that is, be made single, without rough spots, without confusion, capriciousness or unevenness - for this is what is meant by the hill and the valleys. And then Our Lord will find a road both straight and smooth when he comes to us at Christmas.

Our Lord came on earth specially for his Father's glory, but he was also attracted by the beauty of our soul. It must have been very beautiful in his eyes, since he did so much to purify it and to redeem it. Is it as precious in



our own eyes, as in the eyes of God? Have we as earnest a desire to purify it, to sanctify it, to fill it with all of heaven's treasures as Our Lord had, when he came to Bethlehem, to begin his life of sacrifice, which was to end on Calvary? This time of Advent must not be wasted, and we must use it to renew these desires of perfection in our soul. We should long for holiness, put far from our soul anything which might deserve God's avenging fire, and we should so live that death finds us completely abandoned to God and filled with his love.

Let us put all our attention into the prayers which Holy Church suggests during this time of Advent. Let us fill our heart with the desires they express. Let us ask Our Lord to come to us, and let us give ourselves to him from the depth of our soul, so he may dwell in us. So many chapels, so many sanctuaries have been desecrated and taken away from God's service. Let us offer Our Lord a dwelling in our soul, so that we can console him for all those offences. It is said of St. Gertrude, that Our Lord found a dwelling-place of joy in her heart. How I wish that this could be said of you! It is up to us, and we should try to do so more ardently during this time.

Since we have the privilege of daily Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we should try to make reparation for all those who offend Our Lord in the sacrament of his love, and this not so much through exterior acts as through the inner dispositions of our soul. Let us build this temple which St. Francis of Sales speaks about, where God dwells in the highest part of the soul, where the will is always ready for sacrifice, for acceptance of his will, where we can surround the Blessed Trinity and Our Lord with the homage so many refuse him. Let us do our all to show him our love.

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## PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

December 19, 1880

We are going to celebrate Christmas in a few days, and we have just had the feast of the Immaculate Conception. I feel sure that you have thought about the preparation Our Lord asks of you, rather similar to what he asked of the Blessed Virgin to make her his Mother. In order to be worthy to receive Jesus, Mary was given a spotless purity and was immaculate from the first instant of her conception. Starting with this unique privilege, she surpassed all the Saints by her perfect fidelity to grace, her love of God, and the practice of all virtues.

Such was Mary when she received Our Lord Jesus Christ. We should now think about ourselves and see what God wants to find in our souls, since at Christmas Our Lord gives himself to us. When Jesus was born, he was adored by the shepherds and the Wise Men, but he also came to give himself to all men. He asks of souls a certain preparation, purity, holiness, so that he can give himself more intimately.

I need not tell you that for all of us, as for all Christians, it is baptism which gives us that fundamental holiness that makes us worthy and fit to receive Jesus. This can be said of us and of all baptized Christians. As for the shepherds who were called to the stable, they were not baptized but they had received the rite of circumcision, they followed the Law, and they were those just men who had been purified by the expectation of the promised Messiah. The Wise Men did not belong to the Jewish race, but they expected a Saviour, and they were the firstfruit of the Gentiles.

For us, it is of faith that at Baptism the Blessed Trinity comes into the soul and makes

there its dwelling-place. We have all been baptized, but it is almost impossible to think that, with the evil inclinations left in us by original sin, we have not tarnished our baptismal robe. Some defile it by serious sins, and they are most unhappy. Others fall into venial sins, bad dispositions, or certain acts which tarnish their spotless baptismal robe and take away its splendour. We must therefore try to give back to our soul its splendour and its beauty. It is the sacrament of penance which repairs the harm done to our souls, purifies us after we fall, and makes us worthy to receive the Holy Eucharist. There is however one disposition which at once makes reparation for the faults we commit through weakness. This is. habitual contrition for our sins.

I could never insist too much on this, as it is the most essential attitude to, please God. This habitual contrition is nothing else than hatred of all and any sin. Many people hate perhaps six sins or seven. Others willingly acknowledge those which are in the line of their temperament, or those that are less humiliating, such as pride, self-love, resentment, etc. However, for a soul to have the beauty of the nuptial robe, it is not enough to go to confession, to receive absolution, to hate all mortal sins; she should try to have a real hatred of any sin, of any occasion that leads to sin. She should purify her soul continually by habitual contrition.

Each one of us has a dominant fault. For one, it will be pride; for another, indolence, greediness, selfishness, vanity, anger, resentment, spite or what not. You know this better than I do. Well, what I ask you to do as a holy preparation for Christmas, is to increase in your souls a real hatred of all evil inclinations, to detest them deeply in order to make a spotless dwelling-place for the Blessed Trinity in your soul, such as it was on the day of your baptism.

Consider your souls as temples of the Blessed Trinity. In deep recollection, see yourselves in the presence of the most Blessed Trinity, who can bear nothing which is not spotless. And it is for this reason that you must avoid the least stain. Not only are you under the most pure, most holy and divine eyes of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, not only have they chosen you as their dwelling, but they want you to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and to have within you the Incarnate Word, whom Mary bore in her chaste womb, so that you may become other Christs, "alter Christus", on earth, through the imitation of his virtues.

This is a fruitful subject for meditation. We should try to go deep into our innermost being, and make a complete cleavage with all the evil there is in our nature. I have known many people who are not quite convinced of this truth, that we should suppress even permissible satisfactions, after we have suppressed those that are not allowed. For instance, as regards friendship, those who formerly enjoyed certain friendships - not necessarily evil - should be more austere in this regard, so as to curb the inclinations of their nature. In the same way, those who gave way to pride, to anger, should be more relentless in striving to be humble and patient before God, so holy and so perfect. One should not say therefore: "I have a natural inclination to friendship, I need this and that". This is not at all in the order of spiritual perfection. The soul can also have supernatural needs: she may feel the need of God, of obedience, of humiliation, of poverty. These needs are legitimate, and one can very well satisfy them. But when you find that you need natural affection, human consolation, beware. For all this is only the result of the evil inclinations you formerly gave into by venial sin.

The soul should tear itself from such inclinations. She should be more austere in regard to

things she had accepted, more mortified in those things in which she followed her natural inclinations which led her to venial sins. When a tree leans on one side, it is made to go in the opposite direction, by being straightened up and tied to a strong post. All this will perhaps seem to you very austere, but it is a great joy to a soul to be made perfectly straight in the sight of the Blessed and adorable Trinity.

It is said of St. Teresa that the reason why she so exaggerated the faults she had committed was that she habitually lived in the presence of the most blessed Trinity. Through recollection, she had gone deep into the innermost part of her soul, where God dwells, and the sight of divine beauty and holiness made her see as hateful and unworthy whatever in her soul was contrary to this holiness. You also have been made to live in this divine presence. When you were baptized, just like St. Teresa, you received the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Your soul is more or less pleasing to the Holy Trinity. Perhaps there is a veil between you and God, because you are not yet detached enough, purified enough from exterior things. But your soul is the temple of God, and it is because you are the temple of God that you receive Holy Communion and hope after death to possess Jesus forever. Take great care of this temple - I wish I could find the right words to express my thought - your care must be respectful, tender, full of faith, of attention, of love, of all those sentiments which go to make up supreme joy.

Try to acquire perfect purity. It will not be a purity that surpasses all others, such as shines in the Blessed Virgin Mary, but a purity as great as is compatible with your fallen nature. Strengthen this purity by all the efforts you make to preserve your soul from all stain, and by the love-inspired jealousy with which you will

watch, so that no shadow may come between God and you. I say a shadow which may prevent God from finding his joy in you. For sometimes God hides himself and you do not see him, but he sees you: he sees your efforts, your desire to be perfect and to be united to him. He takes pleasure in your soul, and he dwells in your innermost being.

It seems to me that these thoughts may help you to prepare for Christmas. This feast will bring you joy, if you take a very faithful and generous resolution to foster in your soul sovereign hatred of sin, so that any sin, mortal or venial, will be the evil you will detest more than any other evil in this life. Offer Jesus this habitual and perfect contrition as a fruit that you want to keep deep in your heart, and whose perfume you want to breathe continually, as St. Francis de Sales puts it. You will find this feeling in many saints. Their hatred of sin was with them day and night, and was the cause of their extraordinary efforts to keep far from it always.

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## OUR LORD CALLS US TO ESPOUSE HIM

## IN HIS HOLY INFANCY

December 24, 1880

Practically nothing in our Congregation has been established but by Providence, we the older ones know well these beginnings. Thus you renew your vows at Christmas, because it is on that feast that the first final vows were taken in the Congregation. It is on a Christmas day that M. Terese Emmanuel, M. Marie Therese and I were laid under the veil after having taken our perpetual vows; since then, it has always been on Christmas day that vows are renewed in the Congregation. That Providence should have allowed this, bears a meaning. Sisters: note well that by it we are made, in a special manner, spouses of the Infant Jesus: for after all it is to him that we will give ourselves; it is he who comes as the Bridegroom of our souls and who tells us: "You want to be totally mine, and I am all yours."

The Blessed Virgin, who has called us to follow in her footsteps - for we are her daughters - intends us to lift souls in sentiments of faith, of hope and charity, to inculcate in the souls of the children an unflinching courage. Herein lies our special vocation: this is what Our Lady expects of us; and she calls us to the very place where she became the Mother of God, beside the crib where she will lay the Infant Jesus, not only in poverty but in extreme poverty.

The life of the Blessed Virgin was a life of poverty, that of a workman's wife; the house she lived in and which may still be seen at Loretto, was a two-room thatched cottage, small and poor. One room probably served as a kitchen, the other must have been the room of the Blessed Virgin. It is there that the angel Gabriel visited her;

but this was simple poverty, not distress, not the privation of all things. There were but a few things, it is true, but at least there was some linen, a few bowls; one had the fruits of a day's work, a place to lay one's head. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not content himself with this; he willed - in obedience to the orders of earthly powers who unwittingly carried out the orders of divine Providence - he willed his mother to set out on a journey, to come to Bethlehem where, driven away from every house, she had to seek shelter with the beasts of the field, and there she brought forth her only son, her first born, the Only Son of the Father in the splendors of heaven.

It is this Bridegroom, poor and humble, that Mary presents you with. I see him meek, obedient, stripped of everything, coming to ask for shelter and not finding any, calling you to give him in your heart the shelter others refuse him and to espouse him in his divine infancy. The Blessed Virgin summons us to this state, because her unequalled glory which started with her immaculate conception, comes to its fulness in her divine Motherhood, and passes through the Cross to her Assumption which is our mystery. It is that Assumption that we hope to have a part in one day, when we shall have merited and suffered here below, and that having passed by the cross we shall go to heaven. There is in this, then, a design of Providence.

The Infant Jesus gives himself to us; we belong to him, because it is at his crib that we come to renew our vows. What do we see in him? Such meekness, such humility! What a perfect picture of poverty, because it is extreme! What a picture of perfect obedience - one takes him, he is laid here and there, they dispose of him at will! What a picture of perfect silence - he is infans! He cannot speak, he probably will not



begin to speak before the age of eighteen months: he who is the Eternal Word keeps silence in the arms of his mother. What a picture too of purity, of spirit of sacrifice! Those small hands, divine and adorable, formed us!

Scripture says that man is the work of God's hands. Of course God has no hands, and this expression should not be taken literally. It means however, that to fashion the masterpiece of all creation, to form that creature in which he wanted to see his image, God set himself to work in a special way, the Blessed Trinity itself was involved in his creation. Everything was made in the Word; the Word is that infant who gives himself to us; and one can rightly say that those small hands of God fashioned the clay from which we came. Those small hands, so pure, so full of heavenly gifts - you know what destiny awaits them. One day, they will be nailed to the cross, it is for this that he has them. Those small hands of the Infant Jesus that you would like to kiss are destined to the most dreadful suffering; his divine body, formed by the action of the Holy Spirit and from the pure blood of the Virgin Mary, is marked out to be the price of our redemption, the victim offered for the salvation of mankind.

The things of the earth were given to man by God. To derive joy from their usage is perfectly in order. If therefore, Our Lord denied himself these legitimate pleasures, it was to set an example for us; he wished it to be so. He has known only sacrifice and mortification; it is this very infant, given to us in purity and sacrifice, who wants us for his spouses. In the very beginning, when God gave Adam a companion, he said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help-mate." (Gen. 11,18)

You are the spouses of Jesus Christ, you are therefore meant to be a help similar to him. This is how God understands our destiny. When God

gave woman to man, he wanted to give him a help like unto himself; and when Jesus Christ consents to raise a human creature to the dignity of a spouse, it is so that she may help him in his mission, so that she be adjutorium simile sibi. When God takes a man to be his priest, it is so that man continue his priesthood and sacrifice, that he stand between God and his people appeasing God and converting the people.

As for us women, we are not called to the priesthood; but as we are called to become spouses of Jesus Christ, Our Lord expects from us something for himself and something for his people: and this something is adjutorium simile sibi, a help like unto Jesus Christ. Whoever says like does not say "equal" but of the same kind. You may have at times noticed a certain likeness between two sisters: even if one is very beautiful and the other extremely ugly, there is however, common to both, a family trait. You cannot be as beautiful as the Infant Jesus, but you can feel as he does, you can be like him, be of the same family. If upon seeing you, one discerns a few marks of his poverty, his meekness, his humility, his credence, his purity, his sacrifice, then you are similar to him, you resemble him; then you are indeed what he wants you to become as he deigns to give you the title of spouse. He makes of you not merely his sister, his spouse, but he makes you his helper, that is, he wants you to fulfill in this world a mission similar to his own. Above all, he wants that, like him, you give glory to his Father.

The first word he uttered in coming to the world is this: "Here I am, I am coming, O my God to do your will." (Ps.38) (Hebr.X,7) Later on he will say: "The hour will come, in fact it is here already, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. (Jn.4,23) The first mark of resemblance a soul must bear