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GOD IS ALL AND CREATURES ARE NOTHING

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

For a week now, reading the Book of Wisdom during the Office, I thought 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 Wisdom 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 the 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 marvellously 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 makes 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 the 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 reflections 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, softness. 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. Therese says that even in the most cloistered monasteries, a certain point of honour 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, and the son of a workman"? 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 fullness of Wisdom. Having let himself be carried away by the pleasures which he found in creatures, throwing himself into all the delights of this world and having enjoyed all that one could possibly enjoy, he came to himself and said: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and affliction of spirit." (Eccl. 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 creatures 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 lookout if a thing is pleasant to you, if it is to your liking, if there is something for your own satisfaction; keep yourselves close to God, so that your soul may find God in all things. May this be your pleasure, 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 receive it in heaven until after it has been purified 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.
