

HOW TO SANCTIFY THE HOLIDAY REST

25th July 1874

My dear Daughters,

As we begin the holidays, I wanted to remind you of resolutions we need to take in order to sanctify this time of rest.

We must not have any illusions: teaching religious need rest as much as the children. There is no other state in which one is more used up; one's life is more worn out than in education and teaching. You see, a mother has had a hard time caring well for one, two or three, four children, and she wears herself out in looking after them. Well, we have, I do not know how many girls to fully care for. It is true that we replace one another, that occupations are divided among us; but we do have the responsibility which tires and wears out the body in proportion to the soul and the desire for good we put into it. Therefore we must frankly take a holiday.

I will give you an advice which might perhaps appear odd to you: do not work too much during these two months. Young Sisters sometimes make great projects of work for the holidays; they want to profit of them to develop themselves, they plan to study this or that. No, Sisters, rest: that is good for the intelligence, that is above all necessary for those employed in teaching during the whole year.

St. Ignatius obliges his religious to take holidays. No one will ever accuse this saint of having wanted to make of his religious soft men; on the contrary he wanted them to be courageous soldiers. He came from the ranks of a well-organized army. Adopting it as a model, he established an admirable discipline in his Order,

demanding from each one enduring bravery, perfect devotedness, constant readiness for self-annihilation, using up his life, wearing himself out for the defence of religion and the service of society. And yet, St. Ignatius recognizes the need of taking holidays.

Hence I say to all the Sisters, to those who stay home as well as to those who are going somewhere, - I tell them all to conscientiously take a holiday and to rest. But understand this well: when I say rest I do not mean to let yourself go. Anyway, what does the perfection of our state consist of? It is to direct everything towards the love of God, do all things to accomplish the will of God and to submit to this holy will with such a tender love that we prefer it to all.

Who can prevent you from a greater attention to the presence of God during the holidays than during the rest of the year? Who can stop you from having a more ardent love for Our Lord, a greater attraction towards the peace made easier to retain when more detached from self, more stripped from self-will; and then, with less little bees buzzing ceaselessly around us, we can profit of this quiet to recollect ourselves and listen interiorly to the word of God?

An experienced spiritual director was telling me that the servants of the Gospel - priests, men and women religious - have one great compensation: that of finding Our Lord very easily once they are silent and enter into solitude. And when I replied that this being so it would then be desirable to always remain in solitude so as never to lose Our Lord, he answered, "Have no illusions: those who live in solitude have the combats of solitude to wage like St. Anthony."

Therefore when you retire to occupy yourself with Our Lord, the good Lord comes to console you and He tells you, as Jesus said to His Apostles in the Gospel: "Come apart into the desert place and rest awhile." (Mk.6: 31). When on the contrary we are always

resting, in silence in solitude, having to gain merits in this life, trial must come in the form of various temptations, worries, difficulties in prayer. (Job 7: 1). Our Lord retires so that we find the struggles and the battles of solitude which, according to St. Teresa, are greater and more terrible than those of the active life.

Profit then of the privilege of your active life mixed with contemplation, since in it when you go apart, when you enter into your inner sanctuary, Our Lord comes to console you of the troubles you have undergone at His service. Remain there, content, happy, trustful, not doing much since you are on a holiday. But as St. Francis de Sales says, when we remain in peace close to Our Lord we do much, when we do the will of God, we profit well of our time.

God's will shall take various forms: for one Sister, it will consist in taking a daily walk for an hour in the garden, doing nothing but look at the birds, listening to their song, breathing in the open air; but all this will be God's will and, by doing it, she will discover a great peace.

When we accustom ourselves to this to hold our souls in equilibrium, to keep serene self-possession, we go back to the children without annoyance, without impatience, without over-eagerness, above all without self-will, with a purified zeal, with a single-minded love of God and neighbour, with a bit more of greater detachment from self, of more child of God, of increased innocence, calm, gentleness, zeal.

Do not think that vivacity, worry, hurry, excitement are helpful to zeal. What aids zeal is to seek Our Lord and to direct towards Him all we have to do. It is thus that we shall take prudent and restful holidays, because we shall really rest; holy, because we shall rest with joy at the feet of Our Lord.

You have been Martha all the year; be Mary for a little while. You know that she did not worry much, and Martha complained of this: “Lord, tell her to help me; see, she remains calmly seated listening to you.” (Lk10: 40). Remain calmly seated at the Lord’s feet. I hope that He will console you, that He will soothe you in your little difficulties, that He will help you, enlighten you, and inflame you. Then you will find the joy of the holidays in a more ardent charity, in a greater purity of heart which will make you refer all to Our Lord: and thus you will come to see Our Lord in all and to love Him more when you reach the end of this time of rest.
