

On Devotedness

October 12th 1873

My dear Daughters,

At the beginning of a new school year, and at the moment of a departure for a mission, before this great work which demands so much devotedness, I believe that I owe it to you before God to speak about the gift of self to God and to our neighbour. For every soul that gives itself to God and enters Religion, there is a first movement in which we believe we have given ourselves completely and without reserve. At that moment we feel that we will never shrink from any obstacle, make no opposition to any sacrifice; that we would pass through fire and flame, expose ourselves to all dangers for the service of God. That is very true; very sincere; but it is grace which carries the soul in this first moment. God helps us, sustains us by a sensible joy, and, if I may say so, carries us in His arms.

Later on, when all this disappears, when God seems to have disappeared, we become troubled, uneasy, and say: "I no longer feel anything, I no longer have devotion, fervour. I do not find what I am looking for..." You see that all the time with the Novices. If they are humiliated, contradicted, if something unexpected comes to disturb their life or the ideas they have conceived of the service of God, immediately they are depressed, discouraged. They always want to serve God well, but they have not yet passed

through the apprenticeship of sacrifice. They do not know how to suffer; and, since they are not helped by God in a sensible manner, they think themselves tepid, cold, lax in his service, and give in to sadness and depression.

I do not think that this ardour at the beginning is altogether perfection. In general, all prudent persons count less upon a young Sister than upon the virtue and devotedness of a person of thirty to thirty-five years, who has passed ten or fifteen years in the religious life. The latter has known trial, depression, even failure. I do not say great failure; but failures from the point of view of courage, devotedness, generosity, perfection. Seeing her failures, she is humbled, she recognizes her nothingness more; then she rises up, in giving herself anew without reserve to Our Lord. Expecting all from him she says: "I shall trample upon my repugnance; I shall be more watchful; I shall pray better (and it costs much to persevere faithfully in prayer, to pray well, when the soul is dry, tasteless, when God gives nothing); but no matter what I feel, I shall pray, and above all I shall despise myself more."

This, Sisters, is only learned as time passes. Few people enter religious life sincerely despising themselves. They must have been privileged by God for that. For my part I confess, they are rare birds that I have had a hard time finding. With time, when one has experienced one's weakness, when one has lived with oneself, knows oneself enough to count oneself as nothing, and accepts to be counted as nothing. One is no longer angry if others find

fault in us, even all our faults, one after the other.

There are some people who see the seven capital sins in us; seven, that is perhaps too much to say, and, yet if these are not all developed in one person, they are there at least in germ, and we must acknowledge that, those who find egoism, laxity, a certain laziness and self-seeking in us, are speaking the truth.. Who is she who is not proud, who is not lazy, who does not seek rest, who is not more or less inclined to anger and impatience? Who does not experience interior revolts, upheavals? Who is not attached to their own will, to self-love?

All this is found in the depths of each one of us; and it is through the knowledge we have of our weakness and misery that self-contempt is brought about. Thus confidence in ourselves is replaced by confidence in God; and, if you add generosity, absolute desire to give one's self, to sacrifice self, you have devotedness.

Devotedness does not consist in doing this or that, in being more or less occupied, in having the strength or capacity to take charge of such or such an employment. Devotedness is found just as much in the Sister who does the most lowly task, the most hidden in the house, as in the one who has the most prominent charge and has the most contact with souls. Devotedness consists in self-contempt, self-forgetfulness, sacrifice; in that good grace in the face of the little irritations and difficulties, the daily grind of work, and it is the sincere desire to do always and in all things the

will of God.

Devotedness is demanded of the sick as much as the healthy, but it is harder to forget one's self in sickness than in health; harder to be in an obscure employment than in another where one is able to take better account of the good that one does, something which, I say in passing, does not always help to make us advance in humility. But what should make us happy and console us is, that being all united as we are, and forming only one body, good is done not by one but by all.

The more we approach God in prayer, the more will we arrive at this detachment, at this indifference which corresponds to the second degree of humility which St. Ignatius speaks of: the soul then forgets itself; it no longer makes any hesitations, any choice. It no longer desires this or that, but simply and solely wants the will of God to be accomplished in it and in all creatures.

However, that does not mean to say, my dear Daughters, that one becomes insensible, indifferent to everything; that one no longer feels any attachment, nor repugnance; for who does not naturally prefer health to sickness, rest to pain, joy to sorrow? One feels all that; but one does not want to have to choose, one accepts what God sends. Also, notice that St. Ignatius does not say: "I am indifferent;" but "I make myself indifferent," that is to say that by force of will, of generosity, one surmounts one's natural repugnance, in order to accept indifferently health or

sickness, from the hand of God, honour or contempt, joy or pain; such a work which pleases us or another which does not please us as much. The will, being thus disposed to not wanting and not liking anything but that which God wants clings by its free choice to that which is pleasing to the Lord, does it willingly, with love, and does not always fall back on itself. This is where devotedness comes in.

The greatest obstacle to devotedness is our self-love. Having given everything to God, we must give Him ourselves above all else. But we do not arrive at perfect detachment at once; and, often, while desiring to do only what pleases God, we want to find ourselves again in the will of God. That is why it is important to watch over ourselves and to continuously give of ourselves and this without measure.

For those who are going far away, to a country that they do not know and in the midst of uncivilized peoples, confidence in God who calls them and devotedness is what will sustain them. And for those who are staying here, in the humdrum of everyday life, in the midst of little contradictions, little tasks, in those things which will use up their strength this is also devotedness to God and to His will. How do you want to be contented, my dear Daughters, in the midst of the thousand contradictions of life, of so many things that oppose your will, if not by always wanting and loving the will of God above everything else? And for that there is no need to fear, it is always done!

In all things, small or great, abandon yourself then to God with love. Then you will be truly happy and truly holy. Happy, because, between God and you there will be no contradictions; holy, because there is no greater sanctity than love of God and union with His will.

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