

OF FRATERNAL CORRECTION

November 1st 1874

My dear Daughters,

This point of the Rule on fraternal correction which you have just heard gives me a good occasion to speak to you on the subject.

I recommend to you first and foremost not to stop at what this practice costs and not to hesitate about having recourse to these admonishments when you believe it necessary for the good of the Rule and the Constitutions.

Secondly I would like to draw your attention to a point of the Rule of St. Augustine which you have perhaps overlooked until now. St. Augustine says apropos of these admonishments (I will take the exact text of the Rule): “If after a first warning the guilty one does not correct herself, before revealing her fault to the Sisters by whom she shall be convinced in case she denies her fault, the Superior should be told, so that if this Sister can be more secretly corrected, the others ignore her faults.”

The reason why I insist on this point is that many persons, even in the devout life, do the exact opposite. Thus a Sister sees a defect, ordinarily she is bothered by the trouble and the inconvenience it causes her personally; she is inclined to point out to other Sisters the little difficulty or the trouble this defect gives her, instead of thinking charitably of the means by which this fault could be corrected.

This is why St. Augustine says that the Superior should first be told, because if the Sister may perhaps be secretly corrected, it is better that others ignore her fault. For to reveal the defects or faults of a

Sister to a Superior does not have any ill effects. Having the responsibility of correction, the latter needs to know the people she is in charge of, and consequently it is well, it is charity, to warn her of their defects.

What we must then avoid absolutely is to reveal the defects of Sisters at recreation, in conversations, in our work. If we were always very faithful to this Rule, there would be more charity in communities, more discretion and something more religious.

For example in the Bursar's office, the defects can often be seen in a more obvious manner, because there are many persons concerned, or because the Bursar being more often disturbed than others she has more occasions to manifest her own defects. Well, supposing the Bursar upon seeing the defects of the more or less difficult persons who come readily to talk in her office, says as an aside: "Such a person is difficult! That is very bad; similarly, were she to show, even to her assistant, what she has been able to notice in the conduct of others; or if the Sisters were to tell others in conversation the defects they have surprised the Bursar in.

Now all that, Sisters, is distant from the charity that sees no defects unless to remedy them! We must honestly admit, we are a composite of defects and imperfections; but we cannot have relations with others without encountering these defects and imperfections. But see how charity is total indeed in this rule of fraternal correction which demand that, if you see a defect in a Sister, you first ask the Superior's permission to warn her of this defect, in order that this Sister can be corrected privately and others ignore the fault.

I spoke to you just now of the Bursar's office. It is the same thing at the kitchen: The Sister-cook usually has defects in full view of others and in turn sees clearly the faults of the Sisters who come to

the kitchen to get the plates and who get impatient when all is not ready on time. Or what have you? It is always like that in employments involving many people who come and go. If she zealously asks the Superior's permission to warn the Sisters concerned of the fault she has noticed in them, she corrects the defect and at the same time has exercised discretion.

When we follow the dictates of nature, we will not act thus; it is loath to admonish; it says: "How can I say that to my Sisters?... Who am I, I who have so many imperfections myself, to dare think I have the right to warn others?" But it has no aversion to say to another Sister at recreation: "How Sister X is impatient, how hard to get along she is!" Perhaps she would not use such harsh terms, but in more gentle terms she will manage to make herself understood, to drive home the point.

It is this error precisely, Sisters, that we must avoid, for there is no profit gained in revealing other people's defects to those have neither the duty nor the job of correcting them; but on the contrary we need this type of courage which makes us reveal the faults only to the person who can correct them, that is to say, to the person concerned or to her Superior.

As to admonitions made directly to the person, our Rule demands that prudence and discretion be practised, and hence wants us to first ask the Superior's permission. And this for two reason: first, because there are some people - let us not have any illusions - who would pester others with their private admonitions, would ceaselessly irritate them and would make themselves most unwelcome. This is quite natural. Secondly, their admonitions, might involve other imperfections. Thus, one Sister might warn another of a defect, and the latter starts to say: "But I have this difficulty..." and unconsciously this might turn into conversations,

into irregular intimacies. That is why it is important that a prudent person judge whether it is an inopportune zeal which inspires us to make admonitions and whether we are guided by an enlightened zeal, two things which are indispensable for our admonitions to be useful.

On the contrary, warning the Superior does not have the slightest inconvenience. Let us suppose that you tire her, you trouble her with complaints having no foundation; after all, that is her job, she is there for that. Let us suppose on the other hand these admonitions are not charitable enough; she can take them or leave them, and do what she judges best in the sight of God; whereas the private warning from Sister might engender trouble, antipathies, the thought that we are unkind, and finally end up in irregularities which I have just mentioned.

Never has there been the slightest inconvenience to public admonitions dealing with purely external things. To say for example: "I warn Sr... of not having closed her window on time" has no unpleasant repercussion. It is the same with couples: all that cannot possibly cause any harm to the mind of others, and maintains the spirit of obedience, of fidelity and recommendation. It is the same for the other point: thus, when we notice that silence is broken, we can make the warning. That is good, it preserves regularity. We must in fact have great zeal for the perfection of our Sisters in order that they may be saints one day; at the same time we must have great zeal for the observance of our Rule so as to leave behind us a perfectly regular and fervent Congregation.

But in order that admonitions attain this good, we must always make them in a great spirit of love; for of all our Rules this is perhaps the one which must specially be governed by charity. Charity, as you know, includes two things: love of God and love of

neighbour. Or, when we admonish our neighbour in all charity, we show love for God by our zeal for His glory, and we also show our love for our neighbour by our zeal for his perfection and by our respect for his reputation.

Be careful then my dear Daughters, when you notice your neighbour's defects never to look at them with eyes which criticize and blame. God, who sees the heart, cannot possibly bless the glance which - shall we say it - looks with a superior air preferring self interiorly to others, in such a manner that we may say to ourselves: "how can one do such a thing? Oh! I never would have acted thus!..." This brings us straight to the Pharisee and the publican. When we encounter some difficulty, we think: "As for me, I would not have done that... How intolerable it is... how troublesome!" And you can well understand not possibly please the care of the good Lord, who hears and sees what takes place in the depth of our heart.

If on the contrary we say: "I have seen this defect, but what could I do to correct it?" It is remarkable how this thought of amending a fault for the good of the neighbour immediately makes all care, all worry cease. The procedure is humbler and more charitable, while the noting of the defects and imperfections of the neighbour which only result in a secret pride lead to impatience and to lack of fraternal aid, two things which are not good.

Let us be zealous then, my dear Daughters, for fraternal correction. Preserve charity in humility, demand perfection not only of yourself but all your Sisters, so that God may render you all true saints in His service.

I have often told you that we can be true saints in the service of God, although we may still keep certain defects and imperfections. There are Saints who retained something disagreeable in their

relations with others. This must be a big consolation for us. Some were annoying, others quick-tempered, other, slow; people make critical remarks of the Saints, during their lifetime.

This St. Francis de Sales, this gentle and accomplished Saint, used to spend it seems one hour for all he did; and that doubtlessly because since he was naturally quick, he wanted to preserve his soul in peace and in patience. Others had a fiery temper, hotheaded, and manifested it in their action. Thus we see St. Bernard on his deathbed, begging pardon of his body for ill-treating it. That must have been an immoderation, an imperfection, which could be noticed in his conduct and in his relations with others.

As you see however, these exterior imperfections are no obstacle to sanctity. Among the persons with whom we live, there are some who can be very pleasing to God, closely united to Our Lord and yet retain some exterior imperfections.

Let us ask God that in spite of certain things which are like wrinkles on the skin, they may live in the intimate depths of their souls in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ, and that full of self-contempt, they may attain virtue and holiness.
