

1st February 1874

HUMILITY

My dear Daughters,

I should like to say a word about the feast we celebrate tomorrow and which is one of the greatest feasts of Our Lady's humility. We honour her faithfully keeping a law that was not made for her. When she became a Mother by a glorious privilege she remained a Virgin, but she chose the humility of obedience, the dependence of obedience, and followed the custom of ordinary women of her race. So, Sisters, learn humility from her.

The older I get, the more clearly I see that this is the most necessary virtue in the Religious Life. I do not mean, of course, a humility of words and outward appearance, but real, true, sincere humility that is deep in the heart and that offers God the sacrifice of self-love in all its forms.

Everyone has her own special form of self-love: pride is one kind, vanity is another. Sad to say I know sisters who are visibly vain. Of course it is not of bodily things that they are vain, but of things of the mind. Others have a certain interior conceit and seek to be well thought of by others. And there are countless other faults contrary to real, sincere humility. Each one has to look into her heart, into its secret depths where no other eye can penetrate, and ruthlessly pull up the last roots of this evil.

One of you might say to me: "But Mother, I never thought of such a thing.... I did not mean that.... if only you could see what I really am... May be: How can I tell? You are perhaps all you think and

say. But, believe me, there are very few people, very few, who are free from blemishes of this kind. It needs courage and generosity to look into oneself as one really is, at one's dispositions, at all one says and does, and to cut away everything that has a suggestion of self-love. Take a person who talks a lot about herself. She thinks she does so with humility, but that is a difficult thing to do. The saints knew this and their advice was not to talk about oneself. They did not do it themselves. This talking about self is a thing to give up, as is anything tinged with self-love.

Unfortunately it is easy for us to see what is lacking in others because we have a front pocket for their faults. Do we never think interiorly: "That is a word that shows self-love.... a movement that shows vanity?" Or: "How hard she is to live with. She is so touchy!" When we notice things like that in others the right reaction is to look at ourselves and say: "I am quick enough at seeing self-love in others. But am I not as bad myself? Ought I not to look at the beam in my own eye before looking at the speck in my brother's eye?"¹.

Alas! How easy it is to be blind to one's own faults and not to see how self-love influences us and gives rise to this or that impression or choice or reaction. When all of a sudden something happens that makes pride show its ugly head, this is a great surprise to some people who are convinced that all their life they have had the gift of deep humility and detachment. What is the explanation? They never learnt to pull up the evil roots of pride, and it suddenly makes its appearance. It is like that horrible couch grass or dog-weed with its ten thousand roots growing everywhere; one does not know how they got there or how to get rid of them.

¹ Mat. 7:3

You see, Sisters, this is a work for all ages and all seasons. Do not think that it is easy to get rid of attachment to creatures or to self, or to shake off self-love. It is a pig-headed fault. It even feeds on our good qualities and thrives on the little good we may leave on our path.

Indeed, someone who had succeeded in stripping herself wholly of self-love would indeed be a rare and precious treasure and it would be worthwhile going to the end of the earth to find such a person. She would be truly poor in spirit, truly watchful to remove anything that might stain her soul. She would have conquered self-will and self-love. We cannot doubt that such a person is dear to the heart of God and He pours light and grace on her.

Certainly what stain the hearts of nuns are not gross sins. The fumes of sins against the sixth Commandment do not darken their souls. Our trouble is the fog of self-love that clings to us and wraps us up in ourselves. To get rid of all that is the secret of happiness.

How happy we should be if we loved God and not self! We should enjoy the peace that comes from being humble towards our neighbour. That would make us lovable and loved. As Pascal says: "What is hateful is 'I' and 'me'". In proportion to our self-effacement and our self-forgetfulness we become lovable to God and man. . Then peace, a deep and happy peace settles in our soul because we are free from solitudes that fret worldly people. They get jealous and upset about the least decoration given to one and not to another. Once I found it hard to keep serious when a man showed me a decoration he was wearing and said: "Look, Madame, at this mark of honour".

Well, Sisters, self-love that shows up so clearly in people of the

world is more hidden in us. But we have to be watchful and fight against it. If we get rid of it we shall find perfect joy in our religious life and true union with God and with our neighbour.