

8th February 1874

HUMILITY

My dear Daughters,

Last Sunday (2.1.74) I said a few words about Humility. Today I am going to speak about it again and urge you to give it your most earnest attention. It is such a necessary virtue in the Religious Life. It is rooted in the fact that we are poor, weak, miserable creatures, who fell in Adam and are inclined to evil.

How far do we believe in the effects of Original Sin? Of course we believe in them because the Church teaches us to. Then why does the experience of our evil tendencies cause us discouragement, since we know that we are inclined to evil? And why be astonished at seeing our evil inclinations or at being told of them by others who see them? The reason is that we are not really and truly convinced that Original Sin has left its effects in us.

Certainly, you are on the road to perfection, and you keep away from the shameful sins of the worldly. All the same, don't have any illusions about this: though we do not fall into gross sins, we still have within us the roots of all the capital sins. True humility, which makes us sincere with God and with our own conscience, makes us realise that these roots are there. It shows us the work we have to do to get rid of them so as to allow Our Lord to live in us. And so, seeing our ugliness, we reach a state of deep mistrust of self, and place all our trust in God. We learn to keep self in the background, to have a very poor opinion of ourselves and to desire to give everything to Our Lord.

If we take the seven capital sins one by one, we will find in ourselves the seeds of each of them. We have to know how to look

at ourselves very carefully, to be able to see in ourselves the offspring of pride: self-love, vanity, the desire to please and to be noticed, the need to get to the top, to dominate: in a word all the effects of pride, which is the most prominent sin in the fall of man.

Next take avarice. Could that possibly be in us? Alas, yes. Look well at your attitude towards anything that can be owned or given, towards all that belongs to God or to this world, and towards poverty. And we must not think either that we are wholly immune from envy. It is a thing that fills us with horror, but do we really never feel its touch?

We need courage to look at all this, but we have to, if we want to know ourselves. Many people think they know themselves when they only see themselves in the light of God, with their supernatural destiny, with the graces and the gifts that they have received in prayer. All of this is good; because it is thus that we are made in the image of God, showered with his gifts, filled with his mercies. But for those people everything stops there: they draw the curtain and do not look at the other side.

It is not enough to see that we have such and such a light, such and such a tendency, such and such feelings of devotion: this is the side of the gifts of God for which we must be very grateful. But we must also look at the other side: that of our lowliness that teaches us to be always mistrustful of ourselves and to recognise that we are the poor wretched earth, full of thorns and brambles, on which, nevertheless the divine dew falls in abundance.

This is the comparison that naturally gives rise to humility, which consists in acknowledging that one is absolutely unworthy of the gifts of God and of his love, in being unastonished at discovering that we are poor and wretched, with imperfect thoughts. But which also consists in steeping ourselves in gratitude towards God who

never tires of doing good for us, although we have habitually abused his gifts.

Humility brings us face to face on the one hand with our imperfections and our wretchedness, and on the other hand with the goodness and mercy of God. We are like twisted trees or like badly brought up and unattractive children, who can still count on their parents' affection. God is for us this father full of affection, who puts up with everything and never wearies of us. For every fresh misery He finds fresh mercy. He supports us when we are weak; when we stumble He lifts us up.

In all this, humility, showing us on the one hand our misery, ugliness and unfaithfulness, gives us at the same time an unbounded trust in God. Indeed why should not God who has loved us in spite of all, love us to the end? And since He has kept us safe from childhood why not hope He will ever hold us through life and death, in the arms of His superabundant tenderness, a tenderness that far surpasses our thoughts and hopes and even our infidelities?

This is how we learn to know ourselves, to trust God and mistrust self. And this too cures us of the not very edifying surprise that the discovery of our faults and difficulties sometimes give us. I have seen people in bitter discouragement and chagrin at this discovery. How could it possibly happen that such an *angel* on earth, find her feet in the mud? Nothing could be more natural. This *angel* is only a poor creature made of the mud of the earth, inclined to evil by the sin of her first father and mother. All her life God is turning her away from evil and bringing her back towards the good, covering her with graces, as long as she will accept them and be humble in the face of them.

When God finds a soul who really knows how to humble herself in true lowliness and who receives His graces as gifts of which she

knows she is wholly unworthy, then He pours out His grace all the more generously and plentifully that there is no fear of her attributing anything to herself.

This is a foundation on which one can never work too much, whether for oneself or others if one has charge of them. This work should produce all the effects of true humility, first peace, which is promised to humble souls; and also great joy, because even if one recognizes one's unworthiness one knows that one can lean with complete and tender trust on Him who is infinite wealth. Then what does it matter if we have nothing? What can be lacking to us since He has everything and is willing to give it to us? A soul in these dispositions can go through all sorts of trials and dangers, through illness or temptation - she can even fall into faults, without being surprised, without giving up, and without discouragement.
