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On Maintaining Peace through Patience

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

In one of his last instructions if I remember rightly, Father d'Alzon left us this word of Our Lord's "Peace be upon you"¹. Peace is of all good things the best, the legacy our Blessed Lord left to His own, their treasure here below. Satisfaction, wealth, pleasure, all those are for worldly people; but peace, supernatural peace, interior peace that radiates from those who have it, is Our Lord's special gift to His friends.

When I pondered on this as it affects you, I asked myself what is the greatest enemy of peace for people consecrated to God, even for all people in general. That brings me to speak to you about a thing that is not given due importance, since after long years in the Religious Life one so often finds it very much alive in one's soul: I mean, impatience.

Impatience is the greatest enemy of interior and exterior peace, of peace in public affairs and in private life. So it is well often to ask oneself a double question: "How far have I fought against impatience?" "How far have I learnt to keep patience with regard to trials, to the ways of God and to the annoyances that come from creatures?"

The Holy Spirit warns us that we have to work out our salvation in the midst of trials. To beginners He says: "My son, if thy mind is to enter the Lord's service prepare thyself to be put to the test"². "Submissive be thy heart; bow thy head, he whom God wills to receive, He submits to trials like gold and silver in the crucible."

We know that "man's life on earth is but a campaigning"³. Our Lord warns us that we shall go through trials in this world, that life here below is a cross, that we shall meet with great tribulations. But in the midst of these sufferings and tribulations He promises us the hundredfold which is precisely the peace of which I am speaking.

The author of the Imitation also tells us that the older one gets the more crosses one has: that no one is exempt, not even he adds, with naive simplicity, Kings or Popes, whose crosses are often heavier than other peoples.

¹ Jn 15:19

² Ecc. 2:1

³ Cf. Job 7:1

That is not the highest of motives, and generous souls, instead of shrinking from the cross ask God to send them sufferings. However, that is a request that it is generally wiser not to make, because we are poor, weak creatures and we cannot count on our strength. How easy it is to see we are weak, and how often we fail before the slightest trial!

Examine during a fortnight what things make you impatient. I do not mean outwardly; I hope you manage not to show your impatience inwardly; I mean what things cause inward rebellion, ruffled feelings, vexation, that comes from our unwillingness to accept the trials God sends us. Examine what are the things that cause this trouble. Often they are such little things! We must convince ourselves that the trials creatures cause us, such as characters to get on with, difficulties in our employment, being slighted or looked down upon, are sent by God, come to us from His hand. God sends us both our state of health that is so often a great source of impatience, and our state of soul which is another great subject for suffering. Some things we find hard to bear because of aridity at prayer, because being ardent, sad or anxious --- each one's character is different --- we cannot find what satisfies us. That is why it seems impossible to bear bodily miseries and trials in one's souls, especially when they are made harder outwardly by our occupations and the people we have to deal with.

If there were no difficulties in the school, if there were marvellous mistresses everywhere! If there were enough Sisters and if all the children were easy to manage! If only we hadn't that child who makes lessons impossible! Or else, if everything went on wheels in the kitchen, and the stove was in good order (because each one has her own little difficulties) there would seem to be no cause for impatience.

But that is not the way things go. There are Sisters who are slow and who find others hasty and tiring, while the quick ones find the slow ones tiresome. God wants things to be like that, so that we can find in each of our neighbours an opportunity to practise patience, and in big or little crosses something to offer Him, opportunities of effort to keep patience in our soul.

So, after this Chapter, I ask everyone, to see how far she has got with regard to this. First look at the causes of impatience in yourself, then those that come from your circumstances, your employment or your neighbour. People sometimes say: "Oh, I am like that; that is the way I am made." That way of yours is just what God wants you to get rid of it, of your personal tastes, of everything that makes you individualistic, so as to become "another Christ" to "put on Christ" and adopt his thoughts, His tastes, His way, His behaviour.

You have to shape yourself to fit the mould you find in the Gospel. You are called to be evangelical women⁴, not of north or south, not of England or Spain. As Father Lacordaire expresses it so admirably: "We, monks, belong to no locality, nor to space, nor to time: we belong to Eternity." Indeed, a religious belongs much more to the heavenly country than to an earthly one; her conversation ought to be in Heaven; her motives should be drawn from Our Lord's example; her thoughts and desires and sentiments from His.

After this long digression I come back to my subject. Since impatience runs counter to God's treatment of us, I wonder we do not scruple more about it. No, I will not say scruple because scruples are things we must not have. But I wonder how it is we do not have more remorse about our impatience. Why do we not work more generously against it?

⁴ "Daughters": word used by Mother Marie Eugenie

Alas, in old age we are very impatient because in youth we failed to work at establishing our soul in that supernatural peace which is the state our Lord wants to find us in, so as to be able to do His work in us.

Our Lord wants to find peace in us so as to give Himself, to us at prayer and it is in great peace and restfulness of soul that He wants to see us working for His glory.

Truly it is impossible to be conscious all day long of perfection and supernatural ideas, and impossible to do good, to give edification, unless one has the secret of possessing one's soul in the Divine Peace that Our Lord brought into the world. The other day I was reminding a Sister of the answer St. Francis of Sales gave to someone who expressed surprise at his extraordinary calm in extremely disagreeable circumstances. "Would you expect me to risk wasting in one moment the little store of peace that has cost me 20 years to acquire?" So you see he had been working all those years at settling his soul in supernatural peace. And this brings us, Sisters, to the second thing that I ask you to examine. When you have looked for the cause of your impatience, I would suggest your examining them how, up to now, you have worked at acquiring patience and what store of patience you have laid up in your soul. That is your wealth, your most precious treasure. It is quite allowable that you value it, so that if when an occasion occurs you too could say, "How could I be expected to risk losing, for such a rubbishy thing, the peace of mind that has cost me so much to acquire?" No one could dub as an imperfection such an answer, the answer of a Saint and no one could be surprised at your holding to such a benefit as peace of soul. A nun is in her rights if she is attached to it and defends it as her property. It is the heirloom Our Lord left His followers. Pray, Sisters, pray a lot to obtain it.

Ask for true peace, peace through patience; there can be no other. To want peace without difficulties, without annoyances, is not Christian, but pagan. Look at the history of paganism, men sought for peace and nowhere could they find it either in the family or in the State. God seemed to be multiplying things like war, pestilence, earthquakes; so many towns ruined; there were disasters of all sorts in those days.

As for us, followers of Our Lord, the peace we must pursue is not free from trials and tribulations. We must seek it in patience, in the life of Our Lord, in the imitation of His virtues, in the teachings of God's Word. If you look up the word "patience" in a Biblical concordance, you will find it is used quite a number of times. Time and time again it is mentioned and especially in the New Testament: the Holy Spirit attributes it to God Himself, and shows how it is the virtue of virtues, the bond of perfection, the very best way to make our work and all our deeds perfect.

So, dear Daughters, seek your peace by patience. Make that your resolution for today. Don't forget the two examinations I have recommended: one on the little things whether interior or exterior that make your impatience: the other on the degree of peace that you have stored up in your soul, and on the efforts you make to become like Our Lord in His patience and His peace.

