



March 14th, 1880

ON OBEDIENCE

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

We enter into Passiontide, and holy Church constantly brings before us the distinctive trait of sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ: his obedience. “He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

For quite some time I have been wanting to insist on this point with you, making you notice that one of the great distressing facts of our times is that one no longer enters religion, with the ideas of obedience we formerly had, when, already at home, we were accustomed to respect authority and be obedient in a spirit of faith. When obedience was part and parcel of life's habits from the age of four or five, religious obedience - greater, higher, more supernatural - was simply added on to this Christian spirit of obedience imbibed in the home.

Today, the opposite is true; and we see this clearly in the children we have to educate. Their parents had no idea of the obedience they should have asked of them, and they had no idea of the obedience they owed their parents. This is one of

the most difficult points in educating them: how to give them some supernatural idea of obedience. We can bring about their giving in; but we do not succeed in making them understand that obedience is the great law of life, and that each one must obey according to his station in life.

If, from the children, we pass on to the persons who enter religious life, we see that generally they do not bring with them the right notion of obedience since they were not accustomed to obey during their childhood days. The conclusion is that it is the duty of the older professed among us to give them the example. They must see in those who have been longer in religion such a great spirit of obedience, that they may conclude immediately that this is the spirit proper to the state which they enter, and that the first thing they have to do is to become submissive, respectful, deferent, obedient, according to the spirit of the Church and the spirit of the Rule. For you see, Sisters, it is not a question of obeying Mother X or Mother Y; no, it is a question of obeying for love of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the spirit of the Church and of the Rule.

Thus, those who enter religion must see in us obedience, and not only obedience as a whole which is necessary for the practice of the vow, but also the practice of virtue which is proper to the vow. We must give them the example of the spirit of faith by a prompt, generous, respectful obedience -- respectful, not because of the persons, but always for God and the vows we have made. Therein lies the duty of us older ones.

For those who enter or who have entered but recently, their duty is to think in what measure they must sacrifice the

entirely false habits of mind they have in this respect. They have their own ideas, their own mind, their own will; I would even say their caprices. This novice wants to do this and not that; today she is well-disposed, she had done her meditation well, her mistress has spoken to her, she will do all well; but tomorrow, because she stayed at the door of her mistress without being able to speak to her, she will no longer do anything. This is very like the conduct of a 5 or 6-year old child: it is not indicative of the idea of service of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the will of God, of obedience in a supernatural spirit, of the accomplishment of the Rule. The young Sisters know only too well how that attitude is still there to haunt them.

Sometimes we say: “What a subjection to a creature is obedience!” Yes, if we obey because the creature who commands us suits us, because she talks to us, hold us in consideration, looks after us; and it is truly to lower oneself when we do all to please a creature; but if there is nothing of the creature in sight, if we only obey for Our Lord Jesus Christ, following the order of the will of God, then it is quite different.

You see, my dear young Sisters, you are not obliged to be religious. You have not made vows; but you are on the path that must lead you to this solemn commitment to God; and once you have entered on this way, it is probable that you have been called to it. Your confessor, the people who surrounded you have believed you were called: there is therefore a strong probability that you are. I know well there are exceptions. It is possible that in the middle of your novitiate, they tell you, after due examination of your vocation, that you are not made for the religious life; but be

careful that this does not come about through your own fault. He who despises his way shall be killed; he who abandons his way will be killed; he who through whim, caprice, mood, wilfulness does not do what there is to be done in the state of a novice, will be punished.

It is not I who say that, it is St. Francis de Sales; and he says it in reference to professed Sisters who certainly have the obligation of obedience, since they have made the vow; but is there any obligation for novices? Yes, there is an obligation to follow the path God has traced for them, in order not to risk, in leaving it, missing in another path the graces necessary for their salvation. And this, I repeat to you, is the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Paul.

There is then for the novices the strict duty of applying themselves during their novitiate to form themselves to the practices and habits of obedience. You have not made the vow thereof; but you must practice it in all that presents itself to be practiced during the Novitiate, in order to remain in the path God has traced for you. I always lay aside the case in which you might be told you are not called and that you have to withdraw into private life in the world. If you are told this, you must do it serenely, in peace and in a spirit of obedience. If you have doubts about your vocation, you must clear up this question with your confessor and your superiors. If you have doubts about your vocation, you must clear up this question with your confessor and your superiors. You might perhaps say that you have no desire to withdraw into private life in the world, but that you do not have any intention either of subjecting yourself to all the practices which might sanctify you. This is very unfortunate, and it is what happens too often. One obeys out of caprice, feeling, whim, one is well

one week and badly disposed 8 days: all that not because of lack of vocation, but of lack of fidelity. It is not that one desires to return to the world; but one feels like remaining as one was in childhood, that is, a spoiled, independent child, persons who pleased themselves in one way or another.

Each one of us has a dominant fault. One is sensitive, the other vain; for one, it is the need to make herself interesting; for another, it is indolence, cowardice, laziness, and many things like these. So as not to vex one's favourite I Isaac, one goes against obedience each time that obedience demand something which costs to this favourite inclination; and thus one is not trained to the virtue which is the essence of religious life. If God has called you to progress and tend towards perfection, He especially demands the sacrifice of this dominant fault. If there is anything humiliating for us, it is to see that we reach the ages of 30, 40, 50 years with one, two, three dominating faults.

La Fontaine's moral lesson is quite true. We have a bag behind us for our defects and one in front for the defects of our neighbour. Those who pass behind us see our defects and could well tell us: "There is in you indolence, caprice, susceptibility, self-love", but we close our eyes. Yet ordinarily in a retreat we see our defects, and there is no more efficacious resolution than that of combating our dominant defect, of trying to get rid of it, of profiting with this in mind of observations, of rules, of sacrifices, of employments.

If we did not have this dominant defect, if we were like God who has created us, we would go straight to Him; and obedience would be natural to us; we would without effort reach that degree of humility marked by St. Ignatius, which is

to prefer the will of God to ours, because our intelligence which would be upright is not. If our heart, our mind were upright, if we were not crippled by self-love, susceptibility, the desire to draw attention, we would go simply towards the will of God. Our intelligence would understand it, our will would embrace it, our soul would be drawn to it; we would do the will of God as the Angels do it in heaven, with joy, with enthusiasm, with love; and to do the will of God is to obey. In all the states of life to obey is to do the will of God. The married woman, when obeying her husband in right things, does the will of God; children, when obeying their parents in right things, do the will of God; in a word, obedience is the law of Christian life, of all human life.

After all these digressions, I urge you, dear Sisters, to ask Our Lord Jesus Christ for the strength of a prompt obedience, a spirit of obedience which is simple, upright, which does not analyse anything and which makes you say to God: “My God, I prefer to die than not to obey you, make me obey you in all things. May your will and not mine be done!” Is this not, Sisters, the spontaneous expression of a fervent soul filled with faith and love? Is this not what should always be on our lips? Every time that we feel in us two wills, the will of God and ours, ours should not count at all; we must go beyond it whenever it is an obstacle between God and us.

I say this especially for the young Sisters. I beg them to ask earnestly from Our Lord Jesus Christ during this fortnight a fervent spirit of obedience. Our Lord gives us an example of the hardest obedience. He could have not surrendered as He did, Bossuet remarks: when they ask for His shoulders to be scourged, He gives them wilful liberty; when He is asked for His hand to place it in an insulting sceptre, He puts forward

His hand; and all that because He willed it. He did it out of love as well as out of obedience. Each one of His acts is an act of obedience, but with full freedom not to do it if he had not willed to. If He had wanted to stop His torturers, He could have done it, as he showed in the Garden of Olives, just by these words alone: "I am", he threw down those who came to take Him. He allowed Himself to be arrested, He allowed Himself to be crucified, because He willed it.

As we meditate the Passion these days, stop especially at these examples of absolute, generous, painful obedience Our Lord gave us without any hesitation. He wants us to understand that having allowed Himself to be tied and bound by obedience, what He asks of the religious, is that she also be tied to the cross by obedience, that she carry the cross in her heart as well as on her breast, and that she consent to all that concerns obedience in order to follow Him and to love Him.

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