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ON RELIGIOUS MODESTY

Custody of our eyes and lips a powerful means to advance in the interior life

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

We spoke last time of created things and of the nothingness of all these things considered in themselves. I would like to continue today the other side of this great question of the union of our heart with God.

We must understand that God is all, that we ought to turn all our thoughts, all our desires towards Him: this is the basis of our religious vocation.

When one enters religion, it is in order to give oneself to God, to unite oneself to Him as perfectly as possible. Why is it that after a certain number of years in religion, one is not very advanced in union with God? What is the cause of this? It is an important thing to examine, and we must ask ourselves often: “What hinders this union with Jesus Christ for which I have entered religion?”

We must often look at the principles that one puts before novices, principles that they do not always understand and from which they do not always profit as they should. So, I am going to touch on seemingly elementary matters: religious modesty, for example. Among us, one is not asked for a constrained religious modesty; but nevertheless, religious modesty is required. We must enter into the principles of all spiritual authors who, all without exception, speak of the custody of the eyes, the custody of the lips, the custody of the heart, in a word, of the custody of the whole exterior. Without any doubt, on these principles rest the recommendations that novices are given about keeping the modesty of the eyes, of having them often lowered, of not raising them in the places of prayer and of silence. They do not always understand very well the reasons why this is asked of them; they do it, but not always; when they do it, they do not put their heart into it because they do not see its importance.

Certainly the custody of the eyes concerns first of all, everything which is not good. In convents it is extremely rare to find oneself in circumstances where one could see something evil; but we, religious, strive not only to avoid sin, we are tending towards perfection. We tend towards it every time we impose on ourselves exterior modesty of the eyes; we avoid looking at useless things, but this without constraint. You are not asked to turn your eyes away from the face of your Sisters who, on the contrary, could lead you to God; but when you

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