

On the duties of one's state in life

15 March 1874

My dear Daughters,

Today I only want to say a word on something that should always be in your mind and which a specific incident reminds me of those days: I wish to speak to you of the duties attached to our state in life.

No one in this world - and we must often remind the children of this - can sanctify themselves except by accomplishing perfectly the duties of their state. The duties attached to the state of a Religious are above all, poverty, chastity, obedience, fidelity, regularity; but it is also the work entrusted to her and which gives her a share of responsibility towards the Congregation. I would almost say, towards the Church - and towards the souls given to our care. We should therefore, do our work very well since it forms part of the duties of our state; but God does not ask that we do more than obedience asks of us. Thus we should not rush about in an agitated way giving the impression that we carry the whole house. No, but God wants us to carry out exactly and faithfully everything entrusted to us.

We are responsible for souls and in our life they must come before everything else. You know that we formerly made the fourth vow of working for the whole of our life for the extension of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in souls. In Rome they found this vow rather vague and that is why, afterwards, we no longer made it. This does not mean, however, that we should no longer keep the spirit of zeal for the salvation of souls, expressed in this vow, which ought to lead us to serve souls devotedly in whatever employment we may be. Everything can be related to this goal, for, let me ask you, would people entrust their children to us if we did not give them any lunch? You could give them beautiful talks, teach them the catechism, and edify them a lot, but I repeat, people would not entrust their children to us if we did not give them any lunch or dinner. So the cook by doing her job serves souls and we

can say that she is one of the most necessary persons in the house. It is the same for the humblest tasks. In the same way, the sister in charge of the clothes, the one in charge of supplies, the bursar, all who have to deal with temporal concerns should see their duties in the light of the service of souls and act always in a religious spirit of zeal and of desire for the good we are called upon to give the children.

Among the 100 children who make up our school, there are about 50 new ones every year. They come to us with hardly any idea of piety, of solid Christian principles; they do not know the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the Church; they have no real devotion to the Blessed Sacrament or the Passion. How many of them have no notions of the Faith, no Catholic ideas! How many are ignorant of the art of ruling their passions so as to be mistresses of themselves and one day be able to serve God and to live as true Christian women in the world! Usually, we give these same children back to their parents at the end of 2 or 3 years with solid Christian principles that ensure not only their personal salvation but the foundation of a Christian family as well.

I have often seen, and I repeat it for your consolation, that a preacher or other person working in the world for the conversion of sinners, doubtless does a great work because they secure the salvation of souls. Nevertheless, this good does not correspond to that of education; for it is almost impossible that a repentant sinner after a certain age, can change his ideas completely and found a Christian family. It can happen but you do not see it very often. Through education on the other hand, through work and effort, you manage to form in souls those ideas and principles that will be passed on to a whole generation. The good you do grows and develops from day to day and this is a great service rendered to God and the Church.

Therefore, I recommend all of you to do whatever your work, do it in this spirit of fervour and of zeal for souls. Never prefer a personal satisfaction, a particular joy to the general good, which

you ought to esteem above all and which ought to be your whole happiness.

By this I do not mean to say that you should neglect your spiritual exercises. No, you need them. But to pray at this hour or at another, to take part in this or that devotion, is a sacrifice we must sometimes make for the children. As long as the exercises which form the basis of the religious life: prayer, the recitation of the Office, the general and particular examen, the attention to the presence of God, are always kept, incidentals may be sacrificed for the salvation of souls - to ensure that nothing evil seeps into the souls of the children, to prevent those bad angels that buzz around them from leading them to sin. Have this always in your mind, looking upon your different tasks as part of the duties of your state, and examine if you carry these out as true religious.

You see, my Daughters, it matters little what job you have, but you must be convinced that it is in the one where you are, that you are to sanctify yourself and not place your sanctification in imaginary circumstances which perhaps will never happen.

Some people think that if they changed their work of their house they would be holier. I have seen sisters - not among those here present - who have gone to two or three houses in this frame of mind and who did not find in one place more than in another this marvel of a ready-made sanctity, which one has only to pick up and put in one's pocket.

No, Sisters, this is something you will find neither at Sedan nor at Nîmes, nor at Lyons. Sanctity is something acquired by means of work and effort, in the place where one is, with the contradictions and little annoyances one has. It is there that God wants us to become holy, and often our desires harm our sanctification because in themselves they are a cause of trouble and an imperfection.
