



February 22, 1891

On the Interior Life
Being Like Jesus Christ

My dear Sisters,

I would like to speak to you briefly about the interior life. For it to take root within us, there is one very first principle: humility.

First and foremost, we must understand that we can do nothing, that we are worth nothing, that we know nothing. This certainly seems very simple when we say to ourselves before God: "I can do nothing, I am worth nothing, I know nothing." But as soon as someone thinks this of us, it is no longer the same thing; we are worth something, we know better than others what we have to do.

Do you know why this humility is the first point and the foundation of the inner life? It is because then we understand that we can do nothing without prayer. It is through prayer that we are powerful; it is by relying on Our Lord that we find strength, and we need it to work on the inner life, to change ourselves, to transform ourselves. We need strength, and we do not have it, but God has it and is always ready to give it to us. To obtain it from Him, we must have in our souls a very deep sense of our powerlessness and weakness.

I will reduce the inner life to three points:

1. It is obviously about transformation; but we are transformed by becoming like our Lord in three things: actions, thoughts, and feelings. If we had all the feelings and thoughts of Our Lord and imitated Him in His conduct, we would be very advanced in the interior life, but it must still reach something more than that, a habitual union with Our Lord.

Saint Paul writes: *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."¹*

We all have faith, but it is the use of faith and its strength that can sometimes be lacking. Our soul is not always pure and humble enough, but Jesus nevertheless dwells within us. That is where we must find Him.

It must also be found in the Gospel. I especially recommend to the youngest among us to meditate with scrupulous and faithful care on all the words of the Gospel. You must conform your life to that of Our Lord. How will you know what you must do to achieve this if you have not studied the Holy Gospel with great care? If you do not study how Our

¹ Eph 3, 17

Lord dealt with every creature, with humankind, His friends and His enemies, the good and the wicked?

Look at how Our Lord acted in the face of all the things that arose, in the face of the most excessive suffering, the greatest anguish, and the most faithful and legitimate affections, for in the end, He left His Mother, He made this great sacrifice, and she was all perfection and all holiness. He left her for the service of His Father, as He had warned her from the beginning: “*Do you not know that I must be in my Father’s service?*”² He left her to teach and to do what was required of Him from on high for our salvation.

2. If you study the Holy Gospel well, if you truly understand the thoughts and feelings of Our Lord, you will be more inclined to reproduce them. His thoughts were all directed to the glory of God, and this is indeed what a Religious should be: *We praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we give You thanks for Your great glory*—such were the thoughts of Our Lord as He walked in the midst of the world. Above all, He was a worshipper of His Father; He sought the means to procure His Father's glory, to honor His Father. To do as He did, we have no other way than to unite ourselves with Him, the glorifier, the Holy One.

We say in the Gloria: *Tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus*³. He alone can render to God all that is due to Him, and He does so in the sacrifice of the Mass and in the Holy Eucharist; He also does so through His Church, and His Church is us, it is you. You are members of His Church, and you are united to the Son of God to glorify Him, to honor Him. You should not be surprised that our Lord expects from you honor, glory, praise, and blessing; this is what we must render to Him through the Divine Office and through our whole life.

3. After the thoughts, feelings. What must Our Lord say when He perceives in the souls of His brides, what shall I say, feelings of anger, irritation, jealousy, in short, imperfect feelings? In Him, on the contrary, you always find love, charity, patience, everything that can harmonize with the glory of God, which was the object of His thoughts, but also of His feelings. He told you: *Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart*⁴.

You will always find in Him that gentle and humble Heart, overflowing with goodness and mercy; this is how He has shown Himself to us, and see His Church, how He has entrusted it with the responsibility of always forgiving. Therefore, in the Heart of Jesus, there are sentiments that are always good, always merciful, always patient, always humble, and the heart of the Religious Sister must be made in this image. You have a difficult task in education: you must maintain your authority and, to that end, correct the children, but they must feel His kindness, even with reproaches and observations.

The same applies to Superiors: they are obliged to make reproaches and observations in an attempt to correct individuals and guide them toward what God desires of them, but goodness, the very core of benevolence, must not be compromised. Children must be trained to do what is desired; this is a blessed form of force without which they could not be made

² Lk 2, 49

³ You alone are holy, You alone are Lord, You alone are the Most High

⁴ Mt 11, 29

into good Christians. It is right to use force against children, but it must be done according to a higher principle, that of goodness. One wants what is best for them; one has an interest in and affection for these same children whom one punishes. They are reproached, not out of anger, not because they are unbearable, but because they must become energetic, fervent Christians who will be something quite different from the capricious, willful, weak children that are placed in our hands.

In primary education, their every whim is indulged; children receive examples that are anything but perfect, extreme care is given to their bodies, the body comes before the soul; they are given everything they please. In most educations, this is the case. So much for the soul, but the body must be well cared for; it's a very big deal for parents, and with all this, they don't achieve the desired result because often the child catches the seed of some illness. A dentist told me that if children so often have bad teeth, it's due to the sugary things they are given in excess, to candies and sweets; we know this, and it won't stop them from being given them, from being stuffed with them in their families, the same goes for everything else. This is not our approach to education.

Our Lord sometimes spoke strong and severe words to his apostles, such as to Saint Peter: *"You are Satan to me, you are a stumbling block to me,"*⁵ and to the other Apostles: *"You do not know what kind of spirit you are of"*⁶ when they wanted to call down fire from heaven on cities that had not received them. These are not very pleasant words to hear. The Superiors do not say things so strongly, but what they say is: "You do not know what you are doing, you are not sanctifying yourselves, you are a creature who lives according to nature and not according to grace." This is necessary, and Our Lord remains our model in this. I believe that the strongest words He spoke were those to Saint Peter, which I quoted earlier.

Well, Sisters, to follow Our Lord, to imitate Him, we must, after having studied the Gospel well, strive to apply its teachings to all our conduct, both outward and inward, shaping our hearts, our thoughts, and our feelings according to those of Our Lord. This is the path to union; there is no other. Aided by grace, we can enter upon it. Who doesn't know that when a woman makes a resolution, if she doesn't keep it, it is through cowardice, infidelity, and negligence, because she has lived within herself instead of living under the guidance of Our Lord?

You cannot undertake many fasts or austerities. I see that the other Religious in charge of education do no more than we do. But at least use this Lent to advance in the likeness of Our Lord, to meditate on the Gospel, paying close attention to weighing each word and each action in order to see the difference that exists between Our Lord, His thoughts, His words and His actions, and us, in our thoughts and feelings.

⁵ Cf. Mt 16, 23.

⁶ Lk 9, 55-56 (Vulg.)