

On Recreations

27th April 1873

My Dear Daughters,

Last Sunday the point of the Rule we read was on recreations. Today, I come back to this topic because of its importance. We need to reflect often on the great difficulty we experience in learning how to speak well and how to be silent. There is no middle way between these two - one must either keep silence or talk well.

First of all, whatever the time may be and in whatever relation we find ourselves, we need to learn how to cut out all useless words, which, Sisters, demands a lot of work! It is a lifetime study and it is important to examine ourselves from time to time to see if, in such circumstances, we do not let ourselves go and say some words which are imperfect or useless, words which do not have for their end giving information or some knowledge, or doing good to one's neighbour. This examen will enable us to see all the words which have been said uselessly and will help us to avoid them when occasions arise.

But one cannot always keep silence. Some people would like to live in solitude and think that if they were alone, far from people, virtue would easily come their way. Pure illusion! Continual silence is one of the greatest penances; it costs a lot never to be able to say what is in your mind.

Since we do not have to keep silence all the time, it is important that we learn to speak well. Again, an illusion: there are some persons who find it hard to spend recreation

well. They do not like recreation. There is so much noise there, and they would like to be dispensed from it. You would be happy indeed, if you could arrive at such a degree of prayer that you would never need to talk. As I doubt that this is the case, I advice you to apply yourself to spending recreation well, to talk of things according to God's mind and heart, with good religious spirit, for the common good, in a manner that edifies and maintains fervour, in a way that your conversation never leaves either bitterness or unpleasant feelings.

You know that certain drinks are so pure, so light like fresh water for example, that they pass through the mouth without leaving any taste; other drinks on the contrary – like medicines, you will say - leave only distaste and bitterness.

We can apply this to our conversations: there are those which leave the heart contented, more full of God, the soul tranquil. It easy to be recollected and at peace. Others, on the contrary, leave a certain bitterness, a certain uneasiness, or worse - a certain sadness, a troubled spirit, a rancour in the heart. It is thus when the conversations are not entirely conformed to the glory of God and to the love for our state. They are empty conversations. Each one of you knows what she must suppress in her conversations.

Do not take refuge in the idea that it will be better for you if you were not to speak at all. Experience shows, Sisters, that, if you do not recreate at the scheduled time, you do it elsewhere, in a place and at a moment that are inappropriate.

One must also avoid talking all the time. Talk a lot at recreations but pay attention to what the Rule says: "The Sisters shall avoid boring one another." I know that there is no one here to whom these words can apply; but after all it can happen that you may find persons who, out of zeal for animating the conversation, makes themselves boring. If you meet them, my dear Daughters, I ask you to examine yourselves and tell yourselves: "Am I not also at times a bore?"

The trouble is that we who are getting old, often repeat the same things. We love to talk about what we have seen, the persons that we knew; we love to recall our old memories. It can happen then that we repeat the same stories, which are not amusing for the younger ones who listen to us. Let us then watch over our words so that we do not bore others. Let us try to make them kind, leading others to God, and that they never come from any passion.

One is often tempted upon arriving at the recreation, to talk about what has irritated us or made us lose our patience. We come back from the children who were difficult today and say: "Oh! how unbearable these children are! How tiring they are!" The same for the Coadjutrix Sisters. They will say: "Someone left my broom in the wrong place". Another: "Some one disturbed my washing". Someone says: "Everybody seems to have come to the door today".

You see, Sisters, if each one acts like this, recreation will become impossible, and it is not meant to be like that at all. We have one Superior to whom we can go for all our little problems. Outside of that, let us not complain of anything to

our sisters. Imagine the recreation: A Sister comes saying: "Someone has taken my broom," a second: "I was made to wait one hour for the boiling water", a third arrives: "Oh! how tiresome those children are!" The fourth: "I was left to do all the dishes," etc...etc... Recreation will indeed be unbearable.

Learn therefore how to make yourselves amiable. Learn how to enter into a general conversation, as much as possible. Believe that it is no small virtue to make a good recreation. St. James said of the tongue, that it is the smallest member, but that it comprises the whole of evil. And actually it is by our tongue that we show our imperfections, that we bring out our defects. How many evil things are done by the tongue! All the lies, calumnies, detractions, injustices, all the words rise towards heaven, soiled by bad intentions.

If you examine the conversations of the world a little, you will see that St. James had good reason to attribute to the tongue the universality of evil, and you will keep watch over yourselves. This evil, can be produced in a small way in religious communities. And if we do not go as far as mortal sins, we can go at least as far as venial faults. That is why it is important to suppress all imperfect words, all that contains evil, against charity, against modesty, against virtue.

St. James continues and says that the tongue was given to us to glorify God and to console our neighbour. In making recreation well, we are sure of attaining this purpose. May all our words then tend towards the glory of God, towards union! May they bring joy, spiritual consolation to all our Sisters, the accomplishment of the Rule, the spirit of perfection! And thus in a single stroke we have the means to

be perfect, as St. James says: "He who governs his tongue is a perfect man." It is what all the great founders of Orders understood. M. De Rancé says that he was obliged to replace with different specific exercises of charity, humility, and patience the conversations among themselves which do not exist in a Trappist Monastery and which are a continual occasion of practising these virtues of charity, humility, patience and tolerance with one's neighbour.

You, Sisters, who have these means, take them. Do not content yourself with making recreation a duty, but as St. Francis of Sales says, "Prepare yourself to do it with devotion." Does that surprise you? But devotion is only devotedness to the service of God and we devote ourselves to the service of God according to His will, when we pray the Office, when we work with the children, and equally when we try to make recreation well.

To each exercise, says St. Francis of Sales, one must bring the proper spirit. The proper spirit at recreation is not the one that must be brought to prayer. At prayer we must have a completely humble spirit before the majesty of God, and in order to recollect ourselves, to reject all foreign thoughts. While the devotion that must be brought to recreation, consists in carrying out this activity as well as possible, in view of God - amiably, graciously and holily.

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