



December 10, 1876

## Simplicity and rectitude,

### distinctive characteristics of the spirit of the Assumption:

#### rectitude in faith

#### Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

Dear daughters,

For a while now, I have wanted to draw your attention to a passage we read in the Gospel on the first Sunday of Advent and which the Church requires us to repeat every day at Morning Prayer: *Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight*<sup>1</sup>. I attach great importance to this verse, which I would like to explain to you. I do not know why, but when I asked myself some time ago what is the characteristic that best suits us as religious of the Assumption, in terms of virtues, the answer that always comes to my mind is righteousness.

Righteousness is a great virtue before God. When Holy Scripture seeks to portray Job, that admirable man who should be a model of patience for all Christians and a figure of Jesus Christ himself struck by pain, it depicts him as a man who is *simple, upright and God-fearing*<sup>2</sup>. It is in these terms that he is described by God himself to Satan: 'Have you seen my servant Job? Have you seen how simple and upright he is in my presence, how faithfully he serves me?'<sup>3</sup> At the other end of time, if you read the legend<sup>4</sup> consecrated by the Church in honour of Saint Vincent de Paul, you will see that it also says that he was *simple and upright*<sup>5</sup>, taking pleasure in nothing except our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he tried to imitate in all his actions. There is something more, and I will come back to it in a moment.

Why does this character of rectitude seem to me to be the one that suits us best? It is, first of all, because of the very mystery of the Assumption. When the Blessed Virgin left the earth, she turned towards God with such rectitude that she was carried directly into the bosom of the Father, more by the impetus and ardour of her desires than by the hand of the angels.

If we look at the whole life of the Blessed Virgin, we see that she was made righteous from the moment of her conception. We are born with original sin; we are inclined towards inferior things; we have within

---

<sup>1</sup> Mt 3:3.

<sup>2</sup> Jb 1:1.

<sup>3</sup> Jb 1:8.

<sup>4</sup> 'Legend': word used in the liturgy for readings on the lives of the saints.

<sup>5</sup> *Simplex et rectus*.

us an evil root that leads us to all kinds of sin, a self-love so vivid that it is curious to see how much vanity and personality a child displays<sup>6</sup>as soon as reason awakens in him.

The Blessed Virgin was not made that way: she was pure, without stain or blemish, ablaze with love, chosen by God to have more perfection than all the angels and saints, and a virtue so eminent that in this, she is surpassed only by God alone. From the moment of her Immaculate Conception, all the affections and thoughts of the Most Holy Virgin were turned towards God; all the actions of her life were directed towards him so directly that she reserved nothing for herself, nothing remained on earth, nothing was taken away from God. This was the fruit of her Immaculate Conception, and it is certainly a beautiful example.

I say that the religious of the Assumption must strive to be upright; by this I mean that they must, in all things, try to go straight to God. Undoubtedly, their straightness will remain far inferior to that of the Blessed Virgin, but they must go as straight as a religious can go after having received so many graces: primarily, the first grace of baptism, then generally the grace of a Christian education, the grace of the sacraments, and finally the grace of religious profession, which comes like a second baptism to restore the soul to simplicity and uprightness, after the novitiate has brought her there.

It has often been said that simplicity is the special hallmark of the Institute. This virtue results from uprightness. *To be simple*, says St. Francis de Sales, *is to have no double standard, it is to have only one eye always turned towards God*. This is what he calls simplicity. It is also righteousness. It means that we always turn to God, that we do not dwell on ambiguities, difficulties, or reasoning, that beyond all human things, beyond ourselves, we try to go straight to God.

I would be mistaken<sup>7</sup> if most of you did not say, ‘This is what we are trying to teach at the Novitiate’ – for although less emphasis is placed on many small details, the main aim is to teach souls to go straight to God.

I have indicated the main characteristics of righteousness. I return to what is said of Saint Vincent de Paul, that he was simple, upright, seeking to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in all his actions, in order to show us what righteousness in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ should be for us.

Our Lord usually dwells in us through grace; he descends into our souls at many moments in our lives through the sacraments. But we must let him live and reign in us, not only through the righteousness of the servant who remains faithful to his master, but through the righteousness of the bride who refers everything to her Bridegroom. That is the general thesis. I would never finish if I wanted to go into detail; I will only point out what righteousness in faith should be.

We must have a pure faith, uncorrupted, which nothing can spoil. We must believe everything that the Roman Church believes and teaches. We must love everything that the head of this Church asks us to believe. We must, through a lively, pure and complete faith, attach ourselves to the truths that are taught to us. The Fathers of the Assumption sometimes say that truth is the hallmark of the Assumption. But what does righteousness in faith mean, if not truth, the adherence of the soul which attaches itself entirely to the truth and thereby distances itself from the danger into which many souls allow themselves to fall today? For example, there are liberal Catholics who accept the *Creed* but reject the *Syllabus*<sup>8</sup> and do not admit that the Church could have decided what the government of human societies should be. They are willing to believe what the Church teaches about the sacraments, but they reject

---

<sup>6</sup> “Personality”: word used in a pejorative sense in the 19th century.

<sup>7</sup> ‘I would be very mistaken’: expression used by Mother Marie-Eugénie.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix to the encyclical *Quanta cura* by Pius IX (1864) condemning modern errors such as pantheism, indifferentism, etc., and errors relating to the Church and its rights. This text divided the Church in France.

what the Church teaches about modern doctrines. Outside the sacristy and the sacraments, they want to be their own masters and govern themselves as they wish.

Anyone who lives according to the doctrine of the faith makes no exceptions. They take the faith in its fullness, in its entirety, and surrender the entire control of their life to it. To faith, they add the spirit of faith, and this is what we especially recommend to you. We must have a faith that is undiluted and unclouded. We must be simple and upright towards God, seeking good, fleeing evil, letting our Lord Jesus Christ govern our lives in all our actions. We must let his spirit reign in us, so that we may imitate what he was towards the world, towards creatures, towards children, towards death, towards life, towards trials, towards friends, towards enemies, towards all things at last.

This is what we must be in righteousness, this is what we must be in the spirit of faith, no longer just like that patriarch of the old law, but like Saint Vincent de Paul, seeking in all things to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ and to please him.

I cannot go on any longer today; however, I could continue to show you how righteousness can be found in hope, in love, in poverty, in obedience, towards the Rule, towards one's neighbour, and above all how it is found in humility. Humility is also righteousness, and when we are very righteous in the practice of humility, we are also very generous. But I will stop there for today.