



February 11, 1883

**The Blessed Virgin, Our Model in the Mystery
of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple**

My dear daughters,

I had the thought, at the time of the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, of speaking to you about this mystery from the point of view of the immense sacrifice made by the Blessed Virgin in offering her Son, and of the way in which this divine victim was placed on the altar, separated from everything.

For Religious, there is a great example here. They too, on the day of their profession, were placed by their own will, their own choice, their own request, on the altar, as victims offering themselves to Our Lord. This is what they asked of the Church, and it is through the hands of this Mother that they were placed on the altar.

We are now beginning Lent¹, and during this time, it is this spirit of sacrifice, detachment, and self-denial that will make our works meritorious. We can seek in this spirit a supplement to what our health does not allow us to do. In the past, people were stronger, and the work of education itself involved less fatigue. Teaching was an extremely simple matter. When there were children to raise in monasteries, it seemed sufficient to teach them to pray and to sew, provided they knew their religion very well and could write a little French; that was enough. Back then, we didn't think spelling mistakes were a major drawback, provided one knew how to express oneself in good French: that was Madame de Maintenon's own opinion. Today, the proposition has been reversed: we don't strive to express ourselves in good French, but we are very strict about common spelling mistakes. I confess that I somewhat agree with Madame de Maintenon and that I prefer a few common spelling mistakes with a pure, impeccable style, a French where every word is in its place, where expressions are always aptly chosen, to very careful spelling when the French is wrong. But this is a minor point.

It remains no less true that what we have to learn and teach children today in our classes constitutes a real fatigue, and that because of weakened constitutions, we are no longer able to practice the austerities to which we once devoted ourselves. Some also believe that revolutions, upheavals, and modern life have weakened our health. Finally, one thing leading to another, in

¹ Ash Wednesday was on February 7

the realm of fasting, abstinence, and bodily mortifications of every kind, we can accomplish very little. But in the realm I am about to discuss, there are no limits.

When it comes to giving oneself to God, to seeing oneself as something that belongs to Him, to place oneself on the altar in absolute detachment, no health issue can be an obstacle. If our minds are more cultivated, we should all the more understand the extent of what God asks, and put all the more generosity into the gift we offer Him. I want to emphasize above all two things that we often have to renounce, because they constantly recur and can be related to the spirit of sacrifice: sacrificing one's comforts and sacrificing one's amusements.

You may be surprised at first, because we don't have much amusement, and even less comfort. And yet, in a life like ours, it's easy to cultivate a certain tendency to seek comfort, whether in one way or another, in one thing or another. If you know a Religious who, even in the smallest things, never seeks comfort, always takes the most uncomfortable place, never lets herself go in anything, you find her edifying, mortified. It is through serious self-examination that each person can see where she stands on this point. . As for seeking amusement, that seems even more extraordinary to you. In the world, people live only for amusement; they believe they have wasted their day when they have spent it without enjoying themselves.

In the morning we ask ourselves: "What could we possibly do for fun? What pleasures will we have today?" This is the very opposite of the Christian spirit: there is no alliance between the Christian spirit and the spirit of amusement.

In the past, a Christian family was a serious family in which a life was led, filled with duties: duties to the elderly, duties to the young people one had to raise. In short, it was a life of devotion and duty. Two or three centuries ago, one would have been deeply astonished if, in a Christian family, one had heard: "What shall we do today for amusement?" The answer would have been: "What, have fun? That's not the purpose of life." I am speaking here of Christian families, such as that of Madame de Chantal, when she was still living; that of Madame Acarie, etc. It is easy to see, by looking around and beside these families, in the upper classes as well as the lower classes, that in those days, having fun was not the occupation of life. It is one of the sad things of our time to see amusements taking up so much space.

As for you, you have renounced everything that can be called amusements. But aren't there still things that amuse you and others that bore you? We sometimes hear Religious say, "That is boring," or, "That is an amusing occupation. I would enjoy doing such and such." I don't believe that two centuries ago, one would have heard a Religious say, "This is boring; that bores me."

There are also the amusements of the mind: one would gladly read something entertaining. Be careful, this is one of the things one has the most to renounce. You have given everything to Our Lord; you have sacrificed all outward amusements. There remain the amusements of the mind. We can very well have fun with our own minds, either through imagination, or by remembering something that amused us, or by creating amusements within ourselves.

In conversations and interactions, don't we sometimes seek amusement? We prefer a certain entertaining person. Among children, we prefer the conversation of this one or that one, less tedious. Consider, then, whether the question of amusement or boredom doesn't still have some influence on you, whether you don't need to renounce external or internal amusements, intellectual amusements, and those found in occupations.

What we must always seek is not what pleases, what is agreeable, what is suitable, what amuses, but Our Lord Jesus Christ, His imitation, His will, following the example of Saint Vincent de Paul who often said: *What do you want of me now, Lord?*² What we must also seek is duty, what we could do to better fulfill the service of Jesus Christ. If you are very fervent, you will go further and seek sacrifice, presenting a peaceful face to all the things that come your way in life, even to the things that are tedious. We may have to deal with boring people, with difficult children; we must prefer, in a spirit of sacrifice and self-sacrifice, what costs you the most in this respect to what would please you more.

Think about it, Sisters, and apply it to your whole life. It is an extremely practical and comforting point at the same time. Once we have offered ourselves to Our Lord, placed ourselves on the altar, detached ourselves from everything, and accepted the renunciation of our comforts and amusements, we can still find countless opportunities to renew our sacrifice, doing precisely the opposite of what we would like to do. But notice that the more we have been worldly, the more we have lived in the world as it is today, the more effort we must make to renounce our amusements and comforts.

This is what I propose to you during this Lent. You will imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering to God what she held most dear, and Our Lord Jesus Christ, presenting Himself as a victim for us. You will take Him as the goal of your life. You will go to Him instead of going to yourselves. In this way, you will deal your self-esteem the harshest blow you can possibly strike, and you will be further along at the end of this Lent than if you had performed the greatest bodily mortifications.³

² Quid nunc Christus?

³ The Annals indicate, on February 18th, a Chapter on silence of speech and action to promote inner silence. No notes have been found.