



Saint Marie Eugenie

April 1st, 1881

**The generosity and patience you need to learn
at the feet of Jesus crucified**

Dear Daughters,

We said last time that we had to learn generosity in the service of Jesus Christ crucified, and in the meditation of the Passion. However, I did not tell you all I had to say about this. So, I will come back to it today, although my intention is to talk about patience. The transition will be easy for me, because generosity leads to patience.

You have all read Bossuet's beautiful sermon, in which he says that whenever our Lord was asking for something, he gave it. Our Lord, in fact, seems to have voluntarily stripped himself of the right and the power that he naturally had to exempt himself from all these degrees of unheard-of humiliation to which he had reduced himself. He gave himself up for all those streams of pain, for all those movements of fear and anguish that he let come in his soul. Later, when he was asked for his hands to bind them, his shoulders to strike them, his cheeks to let them be blown, he gave them, he didn't refuse anything.

We need to look at ourselves, Sisters, and understand that generosity, which is learned in the service of our Lord, consists in giving precisely what is asked of us, whether by God or by people. We will all reach the last moment of our lives. Believe me, we will regret nothing so much as not having taken advantage of the opportunities we had to give of ourselves. It was an injustice, a contempt, a contradiction, an order very contrary to our will: all these things should have made us give God what he expected of us. If we failed to take advantage of them, we will be immensely sad.

After all, we are Christians. We are in religion, so that God and people can strike a blow at us. Remember what is said in the hymn for the Feast of the Dedicace: *They will be received into the heavenly Jerusalem, those who will have accepted the preparations made on earth and who, by dint of hammer blows, will have been broken, squared, shaped, to be found worthy of entering the structure of this holy city.*

Saint John of the Cross says that we are in religion together, so that some help others to sanctify themselves. Don't turn this around on the others and say: "But this Sister or this other, is she sanctifying herself?" With the exception of superiors, no one has this concern. The superiors are obliged to see if each one benefits from the trials and contradictions she receives. But each Sister has nothing else to do than to keep her eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and, for the love of Jesus Christ, to give everything that can be asked of her.

We're asking for your time. Give it from morning till night. If you find something particularly unpleasant, give it up straight away. It's your honour: if you want to keep your honour in religion, you'll never make much progress. The honour of a Sister, says Saint Therese, is to put herself under everyone's feet, to consider herself as the last one. You can keep that honour. It is your will that is asked of you; but you entered religion only to renounce it. It passes through something that is particularly contrary to your way of seeing, in a job, in an arrangement, in the characters with whom you have to live. Accept

it with love. Then you have to sanctify everything in yourself, which is harder to bear. But to teach you how to do this, our Lord wanted to carry himself the pain and anguish of sadness, the shame and bitterness caused by sin.

You have inclinations, the inclination to talk, to be liked, to want to be right, and that's precisely what you have to give. That's generosity. Generosity is exercised every time we give something that is asked of us. We see in the lives of the saints that those who were in a position to do good never refused to give alms to a poor person. And some, no longer able to give because they had distributed everything, were distressed and worried. This is what prompted Saint Edward to give away the precious ring he wore on his finger as a sign of his royal dignity.

For us, we have no temporal goods to give. But we do have intimate goods, ourselves, all that we are, all that we want, all that we have. We also have our body, with the various sufferings that God sends us. One day it's one suffering, another day it's another. In the end, he will ask us for our lives: let us give our life joyfully, because Jesus Christ gave himself his life for us.

If we take all things in this way, we will easily arrive at patience. To be patient is to endure and to suffer. No one has ever said of a person surrounded by all the satisfactions and pleasures of the world: "Ah, what patience she shows! A person is only said to be patient when he suffers and endures. Something of the sufferings of Jesus Christ must come to us so that we can become patient. If patience is *the perfect way to behave*¹, we must practise it all the days of our lives, and we will only find the strength and model for it in Jesus Christ crucified.

How patient our Lord is! See him, patient, in the midst of the sufferings on the way to the cross. He goes to his death amid all the insults of a furious crowd. He meets his Mother, whose pain increases his own. He falls under the weight of the cross and leaves the imprint of his sacred body in the stone that is softer than human hearts. Well, Sisters, whenever there is something to give, to suffer, to endure, we must study this divine model.

All the saints agree that knowing how to endure, knowing how to die to oneself, knowing how to annihilate oneself, knowing how to be counted for nothing, is the supreme science, the science of the Crucifix. That's what you need to learn, Sisters. To encourage you, I would say that a generous soul always becomes patient. In fact, an ardent soul that wants to give of itself makes a lot of effort. There may be some jolts, some initial movements, but as you overcome these initial movements and give from the bottom of your heart what is asked of it, in the end you manage to give God your health, your life, your suffering, your troubles, your death.

We die every day and, as Saint Gregory says : *The Lord comes when the day of our judgment approaches. He is knocking at the door when he warns us by the sufferings of illness that our death is approaching*². Are there many souls who see this with pleasure and who, as Jesus Christ knocks and makes fall something of this body, which is the obstacle between him and us, sing the *alleluia*, the *hosanna*, and have on their lips only words of gratitude and love?

I saw this at the deathbed of some of our sisters. It is one of the effects of meditating on the Passion of our Lord. It was by meditating in this way on all the painful circumstances of the Passion that a Sister, who died as a saint, learned to give herself with patience and gentleness: "I can't see any more," she said, "but I'm happy, I give my eyes to God. I can no longer move, I am reduced to the helplessness of a child who has just been born; I willingly give this helplessness to God. " This is how we should be, when we feel weaker, more

1. Cf. Jas 1:4.

2. *Homily 13*, on the Gospel of Saint Luke, chapter 12. Office of a confessor who is not a pontiff, 3rd nocturne.

extinguished, more powerless. To get there, we often have to look again at the patience of Jesus Christ in the midst of suffering.

Look at his patience when he is insulted and beaten, when he is taken from Pilate to Herod and treated like a madman, when he is presented to the cruel crowd who prefer Barabbas to him, when he is taken to Calvary amid all the ignominy. Look again at his patience during the horrible pains of crucifixion. What is there like the nails driven into his hands and feet, the bloody, cruel immobility in which he must breathe his last, forsaken by his Father and insulted by people?

In times of faith, in countries of faith, it was not uncommon for even ordinary Christians to find the strength to endure great suffering by meditating on the Passion .

I remember seeing poor people in Lorraine, afflicted with sores and diseases, in the midst of great misery, simply reply when they were pitied: "But our Lord has suffered much more. This is how we should respond whenever we feel a little pain, a little annoyance, a little reluctance to overcome". Our Lord has suffered much more. If the suffering becomes greater, we must console ourselves by thinking of the gall and vinegar with which our Lord was watered on the cross. However little we are cared for, the bed in which we suffer is not a very hard cross. I have seen some of our dying sisters say this to themselves.

Sister Françoise-Élisabeth, reduced by the excess of pain to the point where she could no longer make a movement, said to me: "It reminds me of what I have always considered to be the most painful part of the Crucifix, the immobility of the cross. When the pain reaches this point, you can moan and say: "I am suffering, but I accept it from the hand of God. " Believe me, my sisters, that in order to have this patience in the last moments, we must practice patience in the thousand little annoyances of life.

In the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, it is said that when he was disturbed six times in a row about a useless matter, he responded as gently to the sixth time as to the first. This is indeed no small virtue, and for you who look after children, many occasions of this kind will come across. The contradictions you encounter in your service to children are of two kinds: either the children resist you, refuse to obey you, or the judgement you make of them is not that of others, and your ideas of gentleness, of severity for this or that character, are absolutely opposed to those of your sisters. This is where patience must always prevail.

Remember that there is more good for all the children where there is not the slightest disagreement. It's not necessary for everything to be perfectly arranged and conducted, but it's very necessary that in the eyes of the children the teachers should have nothing but a relationship of union, of perfect charity. All this presupposes patience and the generosity to give of oneself, to sacrifice one's way of seeing things, to always show oneself to be gentle and equal.

So many times, I've heard people say: "I can't stand this". But *that's* precisely *what* you have to give to God; he's asking you for that grain of sand against which you bump. I've known people for whom the sound of a piano was that grain of sand; but there are many others. As I don't want to go into detail, each of you must look inside yourself to find out what you must accept, what you must give, what you must be patient about in order to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Learn to answer like the poor people in Lorraine : "Our Lord suffered far more; what I suffer is nothing compared to what Jesus Christ suffered. " This is how they sanctified, through patience, the pains that were to lead them to heaven.