

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH AT RECREATION

18th April 1884

My dear Daughters,

We often repeat a word at Office that expresses the key-thought of Eastertide: “Risen, then with Christ, you must lift your thoughts above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly-minded.” (Col. 3: 1-2). That sums up the Easter spirit. As Lent is a time for penance, Easter is a time for joy, but, mind you, for holy joy. If Christians in the world have to sanctify their joy, how much more must nuns do, since they aim at imitating the Angels, as our Rule tells us in the Chapter on Chastity.

It follows that we have imitated the Angels’ purity and their life of zeal. I should like you to examine all your actions from this point of view, so as to see if they are all heavenly, if they are done for God alone.

You see, you already belong more to Heaven than to earth. Half your affections are already in Heaven. Half? I ought to say more than half, because your love for Our Risen Savior and for His Mother and the Angels and Saints is greater than any attachment you have for your dear ones on earth. You must keep to the path of heavenly things. See to it that in everything you do there is something of the Angels’ purity and perfection and ardor for souls, and something too of their obedience, so that Our Lord may find in you, as He does in the Angelic choirs the rest and joy He desires. Look at the Angels’ virtues and see if, from morning till night, in everything you do, you try to imitate them.

And now I come to the subject of recreations. Recreation, you know is not for us what it is for the little altar boy who make so much noise at the Church door. Nuns are different. They must not be noisy, nor must they hold themselves badly nor indulge in vulgarity or imperfect ways. Recreation means re-creating, renovating, making new, resting, and such behaviour is not restful for anyone nor a means of recreating. It is on the contrary, most disagreeable for others, and those who behave in this way are left with annoyance and discontent in their hearts.

Now pay attention to this. Recreation is one of the Exercises we must learn to sanctify. We have to talk about what is good, and if it is not always possible to talk about holy things, at least all that is said must be friendly, kind, full of charity and good humour, and even-temper; one must show hearty goodwill towards one's neighbour, so that everything will be holy and godly.

To do this one has to go against self, because nature's bent is not always perfect, and one may sometimes feel out-of-sorts like the monkeys and the Barbary apes that St. Francis of Sales talks about. It may be raining, and we may feel cross because the sky is dark without even the smallest patch of blue anywhere. That is a small hardship but everyone experience it more or less. At other times one may feel out of sorts and snappy because one is not well. One has indigestion or one has slept badly and one is inclined to be gloomy or moody. One can also lower the tone of the conversation by frivolous words that show a lack of recollection. That is a low standard for brides of Christ whose place is a high one near Our Lord, so by rights they should always cultivate respectful and religious bearing, and a certain likeness to the Angels. One is not angelic if one is rough or violent or angry, or if one airs one's grievances. One has not spoken all day, and one begins by grumbling about what has been tiresome. Nuns must learn to talk

without quarrelling and with restraint and gentleness and courtesy so as to give good example.

We have risen to a life of joy. But, Sisters, what kind of joy? Heavenly, supernatural, angelic joy, the joy of faith, charity and gentleness, like Our Lord's joy, not like the world's. When He came among His apostles His greeting was: "Peace be with you". Think with what gladness these words filled their hearts when they saw His face in all the radiance of the Resurrection and all the beauty of Heaven, showing His triumph over death, giving them the promise of immortality. He had opened Heaven, He had founded the Church, His hands were full of graces for them, and He greeted them with the words "Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.." That shows us what Community recreations should be like, full of kindness that eases the heart and takes away fear and makes prayer easier.

I ask you with much insistence to make these efforts to imitate the Angels because now is a time when extra recreation is given. We are going to keep the Feast of St. Catherine's. Try to make it a heavenly recreation so that in your words and looks and gentleness and charity, heaven may be reflected. Examine yourselves seriously, and do your best. To do all this supposes a special talent. Try to cultivate it and to take it to the other houses where you go.
