



*February 25, 1877*

### **The Spirit of Prayer, Source of the Spirit of Renunciation**

My dear daughters,

We have often spoken of the spirit of prayer; but it is difficult not to return to it during Lent. Today I would like to show you the spirit of prayer as the source of the spirit of renunciation. If we were accustomed to seeking God in everything, if we often turned back to God, then, in returning to earthly things, we would strive to follow His light, His will, His spirit, His guidance, and we would set aside all that is our own.

It seems to me that, to achieve this, one must strive, in prayer, after choosing one's subject, after placing oneself in God's presence, to recollect oneself deeply enough to withdraw into that innermost place of the soul where God gives His light, where the poor creature reveals itself to God as it truly is, and where God reveals to it even more what it truly is. It is then that, through a generous act, one must turn to what Jesus Christ has revealed in the depths of the soul.

I don't know if I'm making myself clear. I'd like to find words that explain my thoughts clearly. For example, the great misery of our nature is the extreme fragility of our self-love. When we are thus gathered before God and expose our whole soul to Him, we feel a great confusion at seeing ourselves so vain, so proud, so sensitive to everything that touches us, so full of ourselves. In this confusion, we allow ourselves to be led by our Lord, who is the complete opposite, to a certain love of being forgotten by others. We accept being contradicted, humbled, considered worthless, humiliated.

When Saint Ignatius laid out his three degrees of humility, as he called them, he first said that the first degree is to be ready to endure the greatest sufferings, the greatest humiliations, rather than commit a single mortal sin. This disposition is indispensable for salvation. Saint Ignatius then moved on to the second degree, which is to make one's will indifferent to the things that present themselves in this life, so that not only does one retain no attachment to venial sin, but one is even inclined only by the will of God toward health or sickness, honor or contempt, suffering or consolation.

This second level is already quite perfect. However, Saint Ignatius posits a third, even higher one. He says that the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ means that, even in this indifference, one nevertheless has a choice, a taste, a desire: to be more like Jesus Christ through humiliation and suffering. One has an inclination to choose that which, in this world, can make us appear more humbled, more humiliated, more contradicted, in short, more like Our Lord in His Passion.

See the degree of union with God one must have reached to make this choice! It is Our Lord alone Who can thus change our inclinations and tastes. How human nature leads us to the other side! How sensitive it is to everything that humiliates it, to everything that degrades it, to everything that makes it suffer, to everything that destroys something within it! This inclination of nature is contrary to the intimacy of the soul with God. That is why, in prayer, after choosing your subject of meditation, strive to reach that intimate sanctuary where Our Lord can communicate His inclinations to you.

First, Our Lord will place you at least in the second degree of which Saint Ignatius speaks, in that state where you will be ready for all of God's will, where God's will alone will incline you toward one thing rather than another. I said that this is already a very perfect state. Apply it to your life. For all jobs, have no inclination except to the will of God who sends you there. For all the people with whom you deal, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, have no inclination except to the will of God. For your health, whether it is good or bad, have no inclination except to the will of God. For your inner state, whether it is dry or abundant in consolation, have no inclination except to the will of God.

Let us consider some of the trials that can be encountered in our Religious Life. It seems to you that everyone contradicts you, that you are misunderstood. You had excellent intentions, and they were misinterpreted... But what does it matter! You have no inclination to do things this way or that; you only want God's will. The same must be true for God's permissions: for your relationships with children, for your success or failure, for the opinion others have of you, for your reputation. Reputation is one of the things we can value most. However, it is nothing but hot air, and, in my opinion, it is easier to renounce it than the consolations in our relationship with God.

But, for this as for everything else, we must say to ourselves: "As the good Lord wills, my soul is inclined neither to one side nor the other except by the will of God." Monsieur de Courcy reminded us these past few days of the state in which our Lord wished to reduce Himself in the Garden of Olives. It was a very painful oration, a very sorrowful prayer, accompanied by a sweat of blood. Then came weariness, fear, anguish; and what was the cry of His soul: *Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not as I will, but as You will.*<sup>1</sup>

Well, my dear daughters, even if it were an agony we had to endure, this is the state of abandonment in which Our Lord Jesus Christ wishes to place us. Saint Ignatius, however, finds that this is not the most perfect state. For me, I would readily say that this must at least be the usual state of monks and Religious.

The state of a soul that turns away from mortal sin is the Christian state in general. Every Christian should be like this. You are in the Religious state, in a state of perfection. One of the essential conditions of this state is to establish yourselves in that second degree of humility that Saint Ignatius sets forth. This can only come from the action of prayer in the soul, through which Our Lord will place His light and His inclinations in the place of your own. For this, you must enter deeply into yourselves, so that the spirit of prayer may be the light that brings about the spirit of renunciation.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 26, 39

If the Saints had such a low opinion of themselves, if they could in conscience consider themselves the greatest sinners and the most guilty before God, it was because they possessed a great spiritual light. When Saint Teresa believed herself worthy of hell, when Saint Philip Neri called himself a great criminal, it was the light of the Holy Trinity that illuminated their souls and made them see the horror of the slightest offenses against the Divine Majesty.

The soul is sometimes compared to a dark room. If there is dust in it, it is not visible. As soon as a ray of sunlight enters this room, the grains of dust immediately come to play in that ray. The same is true for the dust of venial sins, attachments, and imperfections; they are not very visible. If a ray of sunlight, or rather, if the entire divine light, the light of the Holy Trinity, penetrates the soul, you can understand the shame, the confusion, the humiliation it feels for the slightest fault. It was Saint Catherine of Genoa, I believe, who said that the soul cannot see itself without experiencing a profound feeling of shame and humiliation.

Each of us would certainly have to stop in Purgatory if we were to pass from this world to the next. And yet, this horrible rust that needs to be purified by fire, we don't see it much, we aren't particularly struck by it. I'm not talking about mortal sins and the traces they may have left within us, but about the attachments in our souls, the affection for imperfections, for inclinations that are different from those of Our Lord and cannot enter heaven. What intimate prayer, the spirit of prayer does is to let a ray of sunlight penetrate the soul, so that with the help of this ray of sunlight we may see the stains within us, that we may conceive a true hatred of ourselves, not, as Saint Augustine explains, a hatred that leads us to kill ourselves, but a hatred that leads us to leave ourselves and renounce ourselves, a hatred that leads us to humble ourselves and to find it good that others humiliate us.

Instead of getting angry when others hurt us, we should say: *It is good for me to be afflicted.*<sup>2</sup>

“This is something that puts me in the place I deserve; far from excusing myself, asserting myself, or defending myself, I must embrace this and, through my inner disposition, allow this external permission of God all its value and all its action for the purification of my soul.”

Everything you do yourself, the austerities you impose upon yourself, the acts of humility to which you submit, will serve far less to help you progress than these contradictions that will come to you from others and from events, despite yourself. It will not be against your will, in the sense that you will adhere to them, that you will want them, that you will put all your good will into accepting them and taking them well. It will be against your will, because it will happen to you without you having chosen it and because, if you had had a choice, you would not have stopped in this way which displeases you and seems unpleasant to you.

This is precisely what is so good. It is this humiliation, this mortification, this contradiction that is sent by the holy Providence of God to sanctify you. The soul that, in prayer, has allowed the light of God to penetrate it, sees that these things come from God. It sees its need for them. It sees the contempt it must have for itself in these circumstances, and it accepts these trials.

Let us strive to make our prayer intimate enough, recollected enough, so that the spirit of Our Lord may communicate itself to ours and draw us out of the attachment we have to ourselves and our self-esteem.

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<sup>2</sup> Ps 118, 71

This supernatural and divine light will not last forever. It may be given to us for a moment, but soon the natural light will prevail. The work of our soul during this Lent must be to increase the divine light within us and to diminish the natural light, which is nothing but darkness and obscurity. The only true light is that which shines within. It is not the light of men. It is the light of the Incarnate Word Who descended from heaven to bring us entirely different lights than those that shone in this world before His coming.

The wise and the philosophers had their own light. Believe me, it was not the light of humility and holiness. Our misery is that we turn to the light of pagan wisdom, instead of turning to the light of Christian wisdom, to the light of the Crucified, to the light as it is in God.

You will not perform many austerities during this Lent, but accomplish this work to establish yourselves in contempt and abasement. Strive to reach at least the second degree of humility. I believe this will advantageously replace for your soul the abstinences that your health does not allow you to make. Your spiritual health will be truly beautiful at the time of Easter, if it finds you established in the second degree of humility, while awaiting the third.