

The Spirit of the Holy Infancy

28th December 1873

My dear Daughters,

During this season dedicated to the, Child Jesus, to the thoughts of his profound humility, of his great love for us, it is good for a Religious to put the Child Jesus before her as a model, to keep him ever before her eyes and to try to imitate him.

It seems, the easiest thing to imitate Our Lord in his infancy. In his crib he is nothing but gentleness and simplicity; he is wholly abandoned to the care of his mother; he does not yet have the divine, supernatural and extraordinary brilliance that will later shine forth in all he does. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to make our own the characteristics of the Child Jesus. All the saints have seen it as the apex of perfection and have applied to the life of Christian spiritual childhood these words of Scripture: "When man has finished, it is only then that he begins."¹ When we have made much effort, practised many virtues, advanced in the religious life, it is only then that we begin. then that we arrive at becoming children.

No age, no era, no temperament, no degree of enlightenment, no level of intelligence can be excused from trying to imitate these first characteristics of Our Lord's life: such simple traits as Our Lord's obedience and poverty. He

¹ Eccles. 18: 6

has nothing he can call His own here on earth; He does not hold on to anything; He receives everything from the charity of his mother who is poor herself. He receives all she gives him, refuses nothing; He depends on others; if He is not given all He needs, he asks for nothing; neither does He refuse anything - He lets them dispose of Him. He is totally abandoned; He is the perfect model of religious poverty.

Observe His silence. He, the Word of God, is speechless; this is the meaning of the word "infant", If the Religious who has to speak, to teach, cannot imitate this strict silence of the Child Jesus, she must at least not speak of herself; she should try to see that her words are pleasing to God, motivated by charity, that they are gentle, in conformity with the Rule and its Spirit in order that nature may not creep into anything.

Jesus is also humble; His is the littlest among the little ones, He is emptied of self. He grows unnoticed. It is true that He is loved because people love little children; however, like all other little children. He is not considered as a somebody. In the same way, self-love, pretentiousness, preference of oneself, presumptions of one's worth, should disappear in Christian spiritual childhood.

There is however, a deeper. characteristic of the Child Jesus that we should reflect upon so as to try to make it our own: it is Jesus considered as the model of perfect faith. He did not practice faith as we do, since He sees divine realities unceasingly, without obscurity or mystery. It

consisted in a perfect obedience and a total surrender to the will of His Father, just as we too surrender ourselves to our Mother the Church through a living faith which finds light, life, and nourishment in everything that the Church gives us to believe and which makes us more attentive to the invisible - rather than to the visible world.

Make an effort to follow the Child Jesus then in all virtues. See in Him all that you need to imitate: He may be a child but no ordinary one; He possess the fullness of reason and of intelligence; He is perfect gentleness and goodness. His self-giving is entire. He surrenders Himself to God without reservations; moreover, He gives himself to humanity without calculations. He has no other motive for the gift of self than the will of God.

When you go beside the crib consider the fact that Jesus is there for love of you. He loves you with such a love that He wants to live in you. He wants to find in you a reproduction of Himself, He has come down to earth to change us. He is the new man who wants to make of us new men.

You see, therefore, that all perfection is found in the beginnings of Jesus' life, and whatever our age may be, we ought to renew ourselves unceasingly in these rudiments of obedience, poverty, simplicity, humility, gentleness, patience, charity - these essential virtues that we should reproduce in ourselves.

It would be a great illusion to think that having reached a certain age, we could have an entire hold on self, take a certain satisfaction in self, be confident of self, and esteem self. All this prevents us from attaining the perfection of spiritual childhood in which young Novices should be and which however, they do not reach as much as do Religious already formed. They do not understand its importance enough; they have not yet worked enough at their perfection in order that this spiritual childhood, be formed in them.

This is a good occasion for drawing the difference between the fervour of Novices and that of tested Religious. Novices believe in their fervour that they can reach perfection and attain virtues at once. They imagine that they love Our Lord very much and are in turn much loved by Him because they speak to Him words of tenderness (which they do well to say to Him); but they do not realize that it is Our Lord who has brought them this far; that it is He alone who has done everything in them, and they cannot understand the advantages of humility, self-denial, self-contempt as much as do older Sisters, who work on these with all the strength of their minds. The disorder would be that all the strength of their minds were not applied to these beginnings of littleness, humiliation, self-denial that we see in the Child Jesus.

Perhaps nothing rests on the spirit of childhood more than the cross. There is perfect agreement between the cross and the spirit of childhood. The persons most

capable of carrying the cross are those who are truly childlike, that is gentle, simple, small, self-effacing. Without this spirit of humility we cannot carry the cross, we get impatient, we stiffen, we make demands of the crosses God sends us.

As you see, the childhood of Jesus can serve as a foundation for all the conditions which it may please God to send us. Finally, for the last of all - death - I have often noticed and you will understand this easily, that the soul who has the spirit of childhood goes through this narrow path easily. A person who during life forms herself to this spirit of gentleness, littleness, goes without difficulty to Him who came on earth to teach us virtues totally unknown to pagans: humility, gentleness, patience, obedience. Whether you are young, or old my dear Daughters, the greatest, most serious study you can make is of the infancy of Our Lord. By the grace of the present mystery, try to make this spirit of childhood reign in your whole life, in all your thoughts in order that you may one day experience how easy it is to go to heaven with this spirit.

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