

The virtues of Mother Therese Emmanuel

27th May 1888

My Dear Daughters,

Since our last meeting we have experienced such a great loss, that I must speak briefly about it.

You all know what Mother Therese Emmanuel was for the Congregation: how, by her religious spirit, her work, her faith and her devotedness, she founded this work of the Assumption. Nevertheless certain of her characteristics strike me particularly and I would like to speak to you about them.

First there is her humility and obedience. I knew Mother Therese Emmanuel when she was young. I knew her in all the stages of her life; and she never lived for herself; she never showed the slightest need to push herself forward; she never failed to act like the most humble, submissive and amenable child towards her superior. This was all the more remarkable, make no mistake about it, for there was grandeur in her, and sometimes even a touch of haughtiness; but this was not because she was temperamental: that she never was either when young or old.

She had an exacting mind which liked to know the reason for things, which was not satisfied except with the best motives. All who followed her lessons and who were formed by her, will remember how reasoned her teaching was and how her manner of explaining matters of faith and religion was both precise and logical.

Given this lofty reasoning power, the complete absence of any pride was all the more remarkable. But because she had a great soul, she was upright and did not stop at herself. I never saw in her any need to speak of herself or to show off before others. Her soul was extremely virginal; and for me, it was this virginity of body and soul, this purity, this uprightness of spirit, heart and will, that preserved her completely from this self-seeking and raised her, so high above it.

Mother Therese Emmanuel had the highest conception of our vocation. For her a Religious of the Assumption should be so raised above earthly matters to reach out to God, that when someone did not measure up to this ideal, that she sought to place before her sisters, she was aroused to indignation. As was her teaching so was her life. She was raised high above the lowliness and pettiness which cause us, poor imperfect beings that we are, to think of and fall back on ourselves. If I asked you for your memories of her, and whether you had ever seen this (pettiness) in her... you would all answer. 'No.'

It is thanks to this characteristic of humility and uprightness that all the graces of God could be infused into her soul. God does not pour out His graces, and especially His choicest graces, on a soul full of self-love, who could seek personal glory in the gifts of God. If special graces were to appear in such a soul, one would doubt and tremble about it.

Generally speaking interior souls are led by one of three agents. The first is the divine agent: this is what led Mother Therese Emmanuel. The second is the natural agent. Mother Therese Emmanuel was naturally rich in imagination and in thought and had high ideals, and I think that at times certain beautiful and holy insights came as much from her own intellect as from the divine agent. Here let us recall the word Father d'Alzon so often repeated. "Each privileged soul receives the grace of God according to the mode of the recipient". Thus St Teresa received hers in a gifted intelligence. Other saints, just as agreeable to God, received His graces in such an average intelligence that what they said appeared ordinary and hardly proportionate with the greatness of the divine light, and not clothed in the beauty one might have expected to find.

In Mother Therese Emmanuel the grace of God flowed into a marvellously gifted intellect, into a pure and self-forgetful heart, into a mind nourished by the teaching of the faith, into a soul where Jesus Christ, her mystery and her sole occupation, dwelt. She sought Him in her studies, in reading, in the Gospels, in the Office. She sought Him

everywhere and it is not surprising that God's light descended on her, to be received (according to the mode of such a recipient) with great beauty, with wisdom and with a certain power of deduction. We do not deny the supernatural agent when we admit, in this way, a certain mixing of natural views, joined to the divine action.

The third agent is the evil spirit. There was never anything of this in Mother Teresa Emmanuel. All those who knew her, who have appreciated her written words, conduct and interior life, have said, "There is absolutely nothing in her of the evil spirit ." The devil can easily deceive a soul which is occupied with self, who wants to show off, who seeks personal excellence; but how could he deceive such a soul, so forgetful of self? I do not say he never tempted her but when he tempted her it was from outside, never from within. Were I alone in saying these things, I would not have such confidence in the wisdom of this judgment; but this is also the opinion of all those who knew her very well, beginning with Mgr Gay who told me "There is nothing to fear in this regard. This is not the work of the devil: it is God who works in her and who speaks to her".

The third characteristic that I find in Mother Therese Emmanuel is the way she corresponded with grace. Our Lord asked, called, spoke, and she responded. It cost her at times, for everything was not according to her way of thinking. Our Lord moreover, led her to His Cross and to great sufferings; how could she not have felt all this?

I have told you that her reason liked being satisfied; sometimes Our Lord asked things that her reason could not grasp when this happened she accepted wholly. What sustained her here was her humility and her obedience. She was so obedient that right to the end of her life she acted by obedience.

When on the eve of her death she asked me, "Mother you have spoken of Extreme Unction. Am I going to die?" I answered her, "I cannot tell. God alone knows the secret of our last hour. But you are so weak you could go at any moment." She then said, "If this is your opinion, then I am very happy, I was waiting for you to say this. Now it is God who wishes it." She was like that always, with the obedience of a child: simple, easy and naive. She had the prayers of Extreme Unction read to her; she prepared herself as well as she could; she received this grace with great fervour and devotion. After Confession she asked pardon of her Sisters and her last word was a recommendation to be always obedient. It was obedience that had been her grace and her strength. She said afterwards. "All my members are sanctified for God. He has consecrated everything in me." On her last day she spoke very little; she was so very weak and had suffered so much! We could only hear what she said with difficulty and it was not always understandable.

From her youth, when she joined me, right up to her death here was a soul rich in God's gifts, and with a wisdom you have been able to appreciate, and whose only thought

was to obey. She always remained in the most humble, pliant and childlike obedience towards me, and, as Mgr. Gay has said, it was not solely through affection. She had for me an affection and a fidelity that I shall never forget, and which made of our two souls but one; yet she obeyed in faith, she wanted me to tell her God's word for her. It was through grace, in order to do the will of God, that she did what I told her, and when sometimes, I did not see quite as she did, her mind turned towards what I wanted. She was the most obedient person I have ever met, and the most self-forgetful.

Mother Therese Emmanuel had a great flame of love for God; she never had any other love; she was of the type described by the Constitutions; "There was never anything in her heart which was not Jesus Christ, or in His name, by His order, or through love of Him." She loved her Congregation, her sisters, the souls she worked for, with an ardent and tender love, but this only in Our Lord, and for Our Lord. Her virginity was complete; it was virginity of heart and of mind, the virginity of the creature who belonged only to God. Her great generosity, her humility and her obedience allowed God to count on her. How can God give Himself, or speak to a soul which would change His grace into something purely personal? Here is the great condition, thanks to which Mother Therese Emmanuel was never deceived and to which she owed the fact that she was the object of so many of God's graces. Because, I, the witness of her interior life, can say that she was filled with graces from God. He had his plans for her and to the end of her life, He worked to accomplish them in her. The eve of her death

she said to me, "I have not done all that God wanted of me I have not fulfilled all His plans." I consoled her saying, "I think that none of the Saints themselves, except the Blessed Virgin, could say at the hour where you are, that they had corresponded to every grace from God."

I am, in fact, convinced that not even the greatest Saints have given God all He asked of them. God is raised so far above His creature, what he gives is so great! Only the Blessed Virgin has corresponded to the whole plan of God, and in that she is unique. for her, one can say that every grace from heaven produced its hundredfold and through this God raised her holiness above all holiness, her beauty above all beauty and made her Queen of all the saints. Starting with the Immaculate Conception, she arrived at the Assumption, passing through the divine motherhood, and the foot of the cross where she became mother of all men. I do not believe there is any other creature, when thinking of the graces of God, who could say: "I have not allowed a single grace to fall unheeded". I do not believe it, and I would not be at peace about a soul who had this opinion of herself.

As regards Mother Therese Emmanuel we see her thoughts and her desires, we see her example. If God gave her many graces it is because she was also a soul of prayer... she prayed always and for this did not need to be in the Chapel. Even on her last day when we were saying the rosary beside her, she said in a weak voice: "I am a little tired, I pray interiorly." And in truth always, in her sufferings,

in her religious life, in the years of her youth, she prayed a great deal exteriorly.. you will all have seen this... but she prayed above all interiorly. There was no place, no spot where, through her living faith, her ardent love and her care to take all to Our Lord, she was not praying.

I will not speak of what she was as Mistress of Novices.. this would be endless. We know what care she took of each soul. I will ask all those who have known her to note down the most supernatural words they heard her say, those which touched them the most.

In short, to sum up, she was a soul whose humility, obedience, prayer, purity of heart and intention , detachment from all selfishness , and faithfulness to grace have been above those of all others with whom I have been in contact.
