

Perfect Knowledge & Love of Jesus Christ

A lecture given to the Community of Lay Assumption (CLA)

By: Sr. Regina Victoria Yulo, r.a.

The Chapter of March 10, 1878 is the heart of a series of Chapters that have to do with the love of Jesus Christ. Other Chapters of the series are:

April 7 Perfect Love of Jesus Christ: Humility

April 14 Perfect Love of Jesus Christ: Conformity to the Will of God

April 21 Perfect Love of Jesus Christ: Charity & Spirit of Sacrifice

We are not created only to know, love and serve God in this world, but we are consecrating ourselves to knowing, loving and serving Jesus Christ and making Him known, loved and served. Half of these Chapters are about this perfect knowledge, love, and service of Jesus Christ.

The point of this Chapter (instructions) is the perfect knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Knowing and loving in the contemplative life are intimately united. The more we know, the more we want to love. The more we love, the more we want to know. We cannot separate this knowledge from this love. The contemplative life is really about knowing and loving.

How can we know Jesus intimately? The chapter speaks of are 2 ways:

1. through Scriptures and **doctrine**
2. through **attention**.

MME goes on to say about knowing Jesus through study – “We must penetrate ourselves with these thoughts, because the more we understand Jesus Christ as God, the more conscious we are of what He is as man; the more His birth, childhood, hidden life, public life, teachings and suffering will touch us deeply.”

Then she says that intimate knowledge goes through 3 stages of attention:

1. attentiveness
2. recollection
3. union

“After studying all about Jesus Christ, the soul must be **attentive to him...** We cannot know Our Lord if we simply have intellectual knowledge or theological concepts, without loving attention to the person we want to love...”

“After knowing... go further and **empty yourselves** of all that is not in conformity with Him.”

What she is saying is, hand in hand with the attitudes of attentiveness and recollection, there is the work of emptying ourselves. We arrive at a certain emptiness, an interior silence by calming ourselves, like letting dust and dirt in the water to settle.

“Constantly place yourself in His presence. This is how we begin in the spiritual life, because no interior life is possible if we do not begin by attention to Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

She gives an example of being attentive – as a child she had to copy the bust of Sixtus V and that of Dante – she had to look very long. “In the end, I knew them by heart.” “If you were going to paint a portrait and looked up in the air instead of at your model, or stand so far away that your vision is vague and general, your painting will bear no resemblance to your model...”

So it is with the knowledge of Jesus and his resemblance in us. We must draw near and study him. Here she talks about meditation, by which we enter into the mystery of Jesus through the gospel, through the mysteries of his life... Then we come to know him and identify ourselves with him...

We need to draw near and look at Jesus – a long and loving look. We need to look at Him in the various moments of his life... his hidden life, his public life, his joys and his sufferings – his way of loving, a total giving... until He becomes total gift! In the process we come to know Him and we are changed. We gradually become like Him who we come to know and love deeply.

From attention we go on to **interior recollection** – something more. “Jesus draws us through grace, and if we are calm and peaceful, if we are recollected and place ourselves under the action of the Holy Spirit, we will obtain a still deeper knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ... there is in the depths of the recollected person, a knowledge that nothing else can give, a knowledge that vivifies everything else, that rapidly goes far beyond anything you have ever learned...”

“Lastly, there is union with Our Lord Jesus Christ – this is the final goal of attention and recollection. Someone who experiences union at least in fleeting moments, can say ‘It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus who lives in me’...”

“This is the fruit of long and persevering effort. No one arrives at this union easily.” This union is the perfect knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Every Christian is called to this union. God can give us moments of union but we still have to arrive at living in that state of union where we are more and more aware of the presence of God.

Then there is the very last paragraph of the Chapter. “This is the fruit of long and persevering effort. No one easily arrives at this union. “It is a great joy, after working so hard, to be established in this state where Our Lord Jesus Christ is the absolute and sovereign Master, when all that He asks is done. The soul readily blossoms in the hands of God, and burning with love, rests at his feet, as did Madeleine in that interior sanctuary where God dwells.” This was her Chapter of March 10, 1878 in brief.

Let us go back to these attitudes and activities she talks about in this Chapter – they really refer to PRAYER... They also refer to LIFE, being attentive to reality, attentive to Jesus in daily life. The same thing for recollection – that kind of interiority, that calm and silence that we cultivate as we go from one activity to another, doing what we are doing at work, at home, in the classroom, singing the liturgy. It is there that we must invest ourselves and it is there that we will find Jesus.

It is there that we find our unity, the unity of our life – in such a way that the person becomes a person of attention, a person who lives in God’s presence.

This is our contemplative life -- our loving search for Jesus Christ. We look for Him in everything. We find Him in everything.

Humility

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Since the origin of the Congregation, there was a chapter on Humility in our Rule of Life or Constitution, which is not true of all congregations, of all spiritualities. Marie Eugenie starts with Humility because she believed that without humility any effort in spiritual formation will not bear much fruit. Why? Because Humility is a fruit -- a result, an outcome of love (MME speaks of the experience of a peasant who realizes she is loved by the King). What comes through is a deep sense of gratitude for being loved!

The Rule of Life of the Religious of the Assumption states, "one who is humble is grateful, confident, truly happy, and simple. Though we know that we need to work for humility all our life, it is finally given as a gift! (RL 42)

As we go through MME's Chapter on Humility, notice how we cannot separate humility from love – the perfect love of Jesus Christ. M. Eugenie herself said: "I cannot do otherwise than to see humility in reference to love." For her, the most important factor is love.

The subtle foundation of the virtue of humility for MME is an attitude born of love – love emanating from each person of the Trinity for each other, and for the whole creation. The experience of being loved by God brings out a strong sense of gratitude, and desire to be like Jesus whose love for His Father made Him obey His will.

She takes Humility from 2 points of view:

- **Truth** - knowledge of God and knowledge of oneself. St. Augustine: "that I may know you, that I may know myself.
- **Love** - it is love that M. Eugenie underlines in this Chapter.

Truth is the first aspect or perspective of humility: knowing that God is All, that God is Creator ...All that I am, all that I have is a gift. Therefore, we know our nothingness and dependence – this is living in the **truth** of what we are. All that I am ... what I have become today has been made possible by God's grace. This is a realization that is based on truth. We don't have to pretend that we are the origin of ourselves, that what we are comes from us... We know that we have received all – and all these have been made possible by one who loves us.

Right at the start of the Chapter MME says, "I want to stress... I want to begin with humility... Without humility there is no spiritual life." We cannot get along in the spiritual life without humility. When asked about what the most important virtue is, St. Augustine said: Humility. And the second? Humility. And the third? Humility. So for us in the spiritual life, it is a question of wanting to be humble, of seeking humility and taking the means to form ourselves in humility.

And for MME, Humility is a question of love. The humility she asks us to practice is in the name of love. Love is the deepest motivation, the most important factor of humility. Love is a virtue that expands the heart...

Then she quotes St. Augustine talking about 2 cities:

- the City of God
- the City of Satan

In the City of God – the love of God is pushed and lived to the point of self-forgetfulness (the word used is not "despise" or "hate" oneself) – but we forget ourselves when we love much. When we analyze the experience of sincere love, the person who loves gives and gives – is willing to do

anything for the other and is willing to be humble. Nothing seems too much nor too low ... Humility is loving God to the point that we forget ourselves.

In the City of Satan, self-love is pushed to the point of forgetting God. The main obstacle is self-love that shrinks and locks us up to ourselves.

The principal work, as we begin our spiritual journey is to uproot false self-love... We can never really know if we are humble. It is clearer to see it from the other side ... the opposite, which is pride. We can detect the movements of pride, we can see our sins of pride. Sometimes it takes a lot of discernment because the devil is very clever, and our own human spirit is very clever in hiding pride.

We know when our self-love is troubled.. we react. It is an instinctive reaction because we want to preserve life. The tendency is to protect ourselves, to cling.. when self-love is touched, we feel the sting. The feeling itself is automatic. So what do we do when the feeling comes? How do we handle it? Deny it? Or do something worse, like react to the person who pricks our self-love? Covering up the thing that is pointed out? We do not readily accept criticisms, we will find excuses...

What do we do when these things happen? Be aware... train ourselves when someone criticizes us-to be quiet, and afterwards when we are calm, look into it, we can say to ourselves, "Yes, there's some truth in what was said." That's what is important: looking for the truth!

We combat all these things by love. "Penetrated by love you should not want to keep the miseries of pride and self-love." MME

For love -- nothing is too much or too low. Let us consider the example she gives: that of Jesus' own love. Jesus manifests his love for us in self-emptying... "He did not hesitate to show us..." He made that love take him to the humiliation of the Cross. The Cross is above all a humiliation...In his time,the worst thing that could happen was death on the cross- the most ignominious death, one reserved for a non-citizen or a slave.

Jesus, in manifesting his humility, in giving us the example, revealed his love for the Father and for us. It was also the revelation of God that God is humble.

Sometimes we take the teachings of Jesus and the things he tells us to do as being things that please him. It doesn't please him that we are humble because it is an act we do for him. It doesn't please him that we accept humiliation because it is a gift that we give him. What pleases him is that which makes us loving, what accomplishes us, fulfills us as human beings and fills us with God, fills us with love.

MME said that, "The motive of our humility is the fact that we know God. Adoration places us out of ourselves and places us at the feet of the other. And it is a joyful act of love, for the one we love is the one who loves us. And for this, humility is not a sad and depressing virtue. People think at times that humility is a sad virtue. Is it sad to follow Jesus in His humility? To offer him your heart, to take the means to find him and make your relationship with him more intimate? Is it sad to pay the price for love?"

Humility is definitely positive. It has positive effects. It brings liberty -- freedom from all self-love, from pretence, lies; freedom from desire for esteem, praise, success

To describe humility MME uses these words: simple, sincere, real, frank, joyful, deep, generous. She says : "I have heard it said that humility is not the outstanding virtue of the Assumption. I cannot accept that, and I regret it very much. On the contrary, Humility must be the fundamental virtue of the Assumption... but take it from the side of love and trust..."

There's another point that MME talks about regarding humility. It goes well with what she said about humility not being a sad virtue, "Our humility should not be one of appearance..." Being quiet...being the last to speak... or act – may not mean being humble at all!

The way to be humble is to have an enthusiasm for life! "To take initiatives and learn new things. To make mistakes and learn from them. To see the gifts of God...How good God is to me!" To discover beauty in nature, beauty in cyberspace that connect us to one another across continents, beauty in this powerpoint that can be a tool for good news...Humility is accepting new gifts from God's hands, from the hands of fellow human beings... to appreciate them as good and use them for the good. When we are grateful, when we can appreciate more and more things... we are on the road of humility.

And in all this – we ask ourselves...What makes me more apostolic? More loving? More humble?

To be humble is also about finding our place. We need to recognize that we have a place. It is one thing go about looking for people to appreciateus, to recognize us and another thing to find oneself. Each person has a place in the group. Each one has gifts which are at the service of the group. In a community each person has something to give.

Find out what it is, and accept and love yourself as you are today. What about my difficulties? My problems? We need to move on. If we don't accept ourselves right now... as we are - it is very hard to advance, to move. If we don't love ourselves, we start pretending to be better or to be worse, pretending we are different... and we get angry...

God loves us right now, and under the loving gaze of God everything is fine right now. God loves me right now.. It takes humility to accept that, (esp. when the "now" finds me at my ugliest moment)

The whole chapter on Humility is a call to love and a response to love. MME does not give little means. There is only one great means: the love of God. All of these being said, humility is impossible on our means.

"We need to work at it all our life. We do everything we can. We desire and work for it. But, in the end it is God who gives humility as a gift. Without Him we will never be humble."

MME tells us: "The more you are sincerely humble...the more you open your heart to love. The more the Lord Himself becomes the promised hundredfold."

St. Marie Eugenie ends the Chapter on Humility with... "Each one has her own path to HUMILITY."

Joyful Detachment

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In the early days when our Assumption families were not yet sure that we knew each other well enough, there was much sharing about points of our spirituality. "Thy Kingdom Come" belongs to all the congregations of the Assumption. But Joyful Detachment belongs only to us, the Religious of the Assumption.

It is understandable because it is tied up with our contemplative life. It ties up with the part that makes us who we are.

JOY is a KEY word. We often speak of JOY / Joyful Detachment... the detachment is joyful!

What is JOY for a child? In the life of a little boy? In the life of a Religious of the Assumption?

Our Rule of Life says: "Joy is the fruit of a life lived for God and for the Kingdom." This perspective runs counter to the world's perspective of happiness. It is so important that this perspective be taught today because of the strong materialism that marks life.

When we have learned what Joyful Detachment is and we have applied it in our life, real joy stays with us in all situations...no matter what happens. Both humility and joy are fruits/consequences of a life lived in love... for God, for people, for all God's creation.

Let us look at the Chapter on Joyful Detachment (part of the series of Chapters where MME describes the "spirit" of the Assumption) "I would like to talk to you about one of the practical consequences of the spirit of the Assumption. The spirit of the Assumption tends towards joyful detachment and going beyond trials and difficulties without complaining and wasting time over them."

MME is not talking about the chief characteristics of the Assumption...She talks now of the consequences – what comes from the spirit of The Assumption. "Joyful Detachment from earthly things" May 19, 1878

In living out the principle of "Adoration of the rights of God" we anticipate His will, and we have perfect confidence in Him. By anticipating -- she means -- waiting to know His will with perfect confidence because we are so convinced that that is where our happiness is. We also honor God -- God is Good. He is Goodness itself -- Infinite Wisdom who knows what is best for us. If God is not good, if God is not loving, then this is not our God because all the time, amid the difficulties and challenges of daily life, we always go back to the infinite love, God's fatherly love and care.

We are convinced that God loves us and he is perfectly wise and perfectly loving, then, anything God wills for us has to be the very best. Trusting him and expecting everything we need... We accept all from the hand of God. When we think about God and how good God is, we will love God more. We give all because we are receiving all. We are the object of God's love

Why shouldn't we have joyful detachment since everything points towards it? God is our Father, Mother ... MME says, "There is never a moment when we cannot fall into God's arms... expecting from Him everything that we need." Even before knowing the will of God (this is her explanation of going before the will of God), we entrust ourselves to him. Then when his will is known, we accept his will in joyful detachment.

God wants us to work, that we seek practical solutions to problems, not to just sit back and wait for things to happen... He gifted us with intelligence and freedom. We must get to work according to the principles and values of the gospel. We must overcome the difficulties that life and the demon place as obstacles to everything we do.

MME says that she fully agrees with St. Ignatius: In any problem seek the help of wisdom as if you counted only on yourself all the while counting only on God, for everything you do is nothing. Many people see only the inconvenience, problems, difficulties. But when asked what the solution is, they have no idea. By joyful detachment, the spirit of the Assumption leaves aside sighs and lamentations – and seeks what God wishes us to do, making the best of things for his service. There is this paradox... *Do all you can but consider everything you do as useless for God does everything.*

Now we come to the CENTER of the Chapter: “All things work together unto good for those who love God” Rom. 8, 28. That is why we have no reason to lament in the midst of all these terrible things happening in the world. Everything, everything with no exceptions: faults...sorrows...trials and temptations...difficulties in prayer...even our enemies, the devil himself...Everything works out for those who love God. St. Augustine does not fear to add: even sin

Seeing things from this angle, you will understand that we are able to overcome everything with joyful detachment, confidence, freedom of Spirit, simplicity – without useless words and actions. What can stop us if we approach everything saying, “This is the will of God. I accept it with all my heart. I desire it. I love it.”

All things work together unto good for those who love God.

This is not an easy principle to practice in life. In trying to achieve Joyful Detachment in one's life, there will be many times when our human limitations will make it very difficult to achieve it. This is why those who desire to live the Assumption Spirit must take on a “formation exercise” to train one's will to seek God's will. Joyful Detachment cannot be achieved easily. It requires practice and daily efforts.

Try to rise above these worries and difficulties, overcoming them the best we can. MME tells us to use our common sense, our gifts and talents, and to make efforts. God is in the present reality of our lives. There is no other sense looking for Him anywhere else ...Today, MME would say the same thing as Lonnergan, a modern philosopher and writer: Be aware. Be intelligent. Be loving.

Take note of what's happening around you. Listen, observe, discuss with others the issues of the day in your community, in the country, in the world. Be attentive. It is not only a question of knowing what is going on. It is also a “way of looking at reality” in the light of “how God is moving in your life and in the events happening.”

- Be intelligent - Understanding the various elements that have contributed to the situation/reality and carefully reflecting on it.
- Be responsible - Seeing in what way you can “do something about transforming the situation from where you are and in what you are involved in.”
- Be loving - Approaching a situation from the perspective of LOVE in the way that Jesus did makes all the difference in what we are communicating to others. The language of love is the unspoken language of the heart. Sometimes, just a simple gesture or look without words can convey this love and the one to whom the love is directed towards accepts and receives it with gratitude.

In our day to day living, if we are conscious that “Right here in this world, in this time and place ... This is where God is and where heaven is. This consciousness will change us and how we face all that happens to us throughout the day. Because God loves me, I will love Him back by doing

good. In every situation we face we have a choice we can choose to react in many ways. If we are always conscious that God is present in this or that situation, it will make a big difference on how we choose to react.

One of the greatest evils in our times is self-centeredness - MME talks about the opposite of joyful detachment. She talks about people turning around themselves, writing autobiographies, noting everything they have said and done... (She tells the story in one of her chapters about a man who wrote his autobiography, and when he went to the press, they did not have enough letters for all the "I's")

Magnanimity - This word does not appear in the Chapter... but this is what she means of the great-hearted, the great soul – who does not stop at little things. That is one way in which she tells us... "let fall...let drop". Mother Ma. Rosa used to say, "Skip it." What MME is telling us here is that we don't "get stuck" but that we can let it go...we don't always have to get 'our way'.

"We are made for greater things, we only have a certain amount of time, of energy." The next line is an expression we find only twice in her writings: "Our life should be a protest against this self-interested life." She tells about many people in the city of Paris, with all their activities, materials wealth... a self-interested life, comparing them to "squirrels who turn and turn with an agility that is tiring and useless. They get up, they get dressed, they take walks, visit people, return home for dinner, go out to a show... creating obligations for themselves."

How much work we create for ourselves sometimes! Life can go by and we have no time for anything. We often say that we don't have time yet, If we really take our life seriously, a life of prayer and mission, what time do we have to be bothered in the bad sense about self? We must live our contemplative-apostolic life FULL TIME.

She reminds us to work on our DESIRE as we free ourselves from useless words and actions, complaints. As we give ourselves joyfully in service to others -- we make the Kingdom of God present. Here she is not talking against our psychology. She is not talking about the fact that the worries get us, the fear that bothers us, and whatever it may be, things can preoccupy us. She is calling attention to where we direct ourselves. Do we turn around ourselves and our problems, or Do we look towards God and expect everything from Him?

This sense of direction in our personal lives is important especially for today – where we are asked to minister to the young. How can we model to them a life that is totally dependent on God if we are still caught up with our ourselves and our problems?

Before the fall, all things were in God and God in all things. That is what we are striving for today: Finding God in all things, loving God in all things, because God is there; God is here!

Joyful Detachment is really all a question of TRUST, trusting God in this world even in the most depressing situations of the world. He is in everything, even as structures and institutions crumble. He is there in the happy and simple experiences of sharing. He cares for our planet and our world and He wants us to find him in the shadows and light corners of this world...

In this world where are we called to find God and to work with God? Our work is HOLY ... and we are happy to be working for the Kingdom "...just as Jesus was tired working for us."

Marie Eugenie tells us, "Let us leave under our feet what delays our rising up. Instead let us seek God. Let us busy ourselves with God. Let us talk about God. Let us love God

The thing that marks our spirituality is TOTALITY. The totality of giving – we give the whole of ourselves and this kind of absolute quality of loving God above all things, of seeking God, knowing, loving, serving Him that takes all of our time and all of our energy and fills us with JOY!

God is always there - always there even if we are not there; always doing us good; always serving us, always loving us! What more do we want?