INTRODUCTION TO THE FRENCH EDITION

If ever a book was worthy of being recommended to the Daughters of Charity, it is the collection of talks given them by their holy Founder. Reading these substantial pages will give them a greater love for their vocation, a deeper understanding of its spirit, and fuller knowledge of the obligations it entails.

In these pages we see the complete picture of Saint Vincent de Paul, whom we can never admire enough. His language is warm and lively, simple and conversational, convincing and shrewd, instructive and practical. He appeals in turn to logic, to the heart, and to the will, with words that often attain lofty eloquence. Whether he is raising his heart to God in inspired prayers, or abasing himself through humility to a place lower than that of demons, we realize that he is not doing so for oratorical effect but that this is the spontaneous outpouring of an upright, sincere soul, giving expression to his true sentiments.

Not all his talks or Aconferences@ to the Daughters of Charity have come down to us. The first two are missing; the third one, given on July 31, 1634, is followed by a hiatus of six years. The Founder met with the Daughters of Charity in the Motherhouse sometimes on Sundays, sometimes during the week. His audience was composed of the Sisters living at the Motherhouse and those who were able to come from Paris and its environs.[1] On July 31,1634, only twelve of them were present; later their number would fluctuate between eighty and one hundred.

Saint Vincent urged the Sisters to be faithful to these meetings. ASisters,@ he said, Anever miss them, not even to go to hear a sermon; for, even though listening to sermons may be a very good thing, you should still prefer these gatherings, which are held simply to teach you what you are obliged to do; and everything that's said here is for all of you and each one of you in particular--which can't be said of sermons. I'm not saying that you shouldn't listen to them when you can, but only that you should prefer to come here on meeting days.@[2]

Saint Vincent would arrive, accompanied by Fr. Portail[3] or, in his absence, by another Priest of the Mission. When something unforeseen arose that kept him at home or called him elsewhere, he had one of them replace him.

His instructions centered mainly on the vocation of the Daughters of Charity, their ministry with poor persons, the sick, or the foundlings; on the daily schedule, rising, and prayer; on the Common and Particular Rules; Christian virtues and those that make up the spirit of the Company: simplicity, charity, humility, mortification, and love of work; and on frequenting the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. He also gave some excellent conferences on scandal, temptations, envy, admonitions, and the Jubilee. Several talks were devoted to the virtues of Sisters who had died. Sisters who were being sent to the Provinces rarely left without receiving his advice. The election of officers was another opportunity for him to say a few words.

As for the choice of topics, Saint Vincent took his cue from events, the needs of the Company, and the suggestions of Saint Louise de Marillac.[4]

A notice sent to the various houses in Paris and in the suburbs informed the Sisters of the topic and points of the conference, the day, and the time. We still have one of the notes distributed before the conference of July 3, 1660,[5] stating that Athe topic for the conference concerns the late Mlle Le Gras. First point: The reasons why Daughters of Charity should discuss the virtues of their Sisters who have gone to God, especially the virtues of their very dear Mother, the late Mlle Le Gras. Second point: What are the virtues that each Sister noted in her? Third point: What are the virtues that impressed them the most and that they want to imitate with

the help of God? For Saturday at two o=clock.@

Saint Vincent would begin the conference with the prayer *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* (Come, Holy Spirit). The Aconference@ truly merited this name because it was not simply a monologue. The Sisters would ask questions, make observations, and humble themselves for their faults. Sometimes there were touching group manifestations of good will, which the Saint prompted by his questions.

At the meeting of April 26, 1643,[6] the Founder introduced a new method. AIn the preceding conferences,@ he said to the Sisters, AI noticed that you needed some help in finding motives or reasons for what had been suggested to you. That's why I felt it would be better to change the method in order to make it easier for you to understand what you will be taught, and this will be a big help to you in making your prayer. I'll ask you questions, as is done for catechism lessons.@ And to encourage the more timid and uneducated, he added, AIf anyone can't give an answer, please don't worry about it because persons who say little sometimes do better, and those who catch on quickly and have no trouble discussing what is proposed to them sometimes don't do as well, although there are some who speak and do so well. Those who speak well, Sisters, should humble themselves profoundly--this is a gift for which they should express their gratitude to God--and those who have a hard time understanding what is suggested, or have difficulty expressing their thoughts, should put themselves in God's hands and make renewed resolutions to do good.@

Then he began to question them: ATell me, Sister, what reasons do we have for desiring that disunion should never arise in the Company?@ AAnd you, Sister?@ AAnd how about you, Sister, who come after her, can you tell us some reason?@ When a Sister had answered well, the Saint expressed his approval or even congratulated her: ARight you are, Sister!@ or AThat was well said, Sister!@ or ABlessed be God, Sister!@

He was delighted with this experiment. ABlessed be God, Sisters! I assure you that I'm deeply edified by this type of conference. I can't tell you how much it consoles me, in the hope that it will be helpful to you, and that you'll learn by this means to discover the motives for doing or saying the things that will be proposed to us.@

Another day[7] he said, AThe last conference I attended greatly consoled me; each Sister shared her thoughts sincerely, and it seemed to me that they were like sparks igniting a huge fire--like one candle that was lighting the others.@

Everyone shared the edification Saint Vincent felt, but did any Sisters have other sentiments as well? Among these simple, timid young women--most of whom were from the country and were unaccustomed to speaking in public--some trembled at the thought of being asked for an explanation. If they were questioned, they became nervous, forgot what they had prepared so painstakingly, and contented themselves with repeating what others before them had said. To avoid this difficulty, Saint Vincent advised them to write down their thoughts and to read from the notes they had prepared. Unfortunately, the Sisters who felt most embarrassed were the ones who didn't know how to write, but he did his best to help them.

Many Sisters used to read their notes aloud, even those who were educated, among them Saint Louise herself, who nevertheless always answered with ease and proficiency, and Saint Vincent questioned her frequently. If her name does not appear in the conferences for which she took the notes, it is because, through modesty, she didn't name herself. When Saint Vincent addressed her, it was always in a more respectful tone of voice; his words of praise were also more frequent: AWhat was said before is good, but this is even better.@[8]

This method of holding a conference added charm and liveliness to the meetings. Sometimes Saint Vincent added other questions to his initial one, asking for details and fuller explanations. At times, he addressed all the Sisters together, and everyone would answer him as one.

They didn't always wait for an invitation to express collectively their desire to do good. On July 31, 1634, at the end of the conference, all the Sisters promised spontaneously to observe the Regulations.[9] At the beginning of the conference of January 25, 1643, they knelt down, humbled themselves for not having sufficiently profited by the Saint's previous instructions, and entreated him to ask God's forgiveness for them.[10]

Sometimes his eloquence gave rise to touching scenes. During the conference of April 26, 1643, on the harmful results of disunion, a Sister asked to speak and said, AWould you allow me, Monsieur, to ask pardon right now of my Sisters for having complained because I thought that some of them had snubbed me in the street, and also to ask pardon of those to whom I complained?@[11] When permission was granted, the Sister knelt down, and so did all the others; she then asked pardon with great humility, naming each Sister in turn.

On March 15, 1648, a Sister who was speaking about the good use of corrections added, ARecently, I was so proud that, when admonished of a fault by one of my Sisters, whom I myself had asked the charity to remind me, I showed that I didn't like it. I most humbly ask your pardon for this, and I ask pardon of you, Sister, who did me that act of charity.@[12] On hearing this, the other Sister knelt down and said, ASister, I'm the one who asks your pardon. I didn't admonish you as I should have done because there were other people present.@ AIsn't that wonderful!@ cried Saint Vincent, edified by this, AOne accuses herself for not having taken the reproof well, and the other for not having given it properly; in this way, each tries to put the blame on herself.@ These good examples added weight to the lessons given during the conferences.

At the end of the conference, Saint Vincent would give his blessing to his Daughters--although reluctantly, because of his Aunworthiness.@ On May 30, 1647, the remembrance of his own faults made him exclaim, AI'll ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to give you himself His holy blessing, and I won't say the words of it today because the faults I=ve committed in your regard make me unworthy of it. I ask Our Lord to be the one to do it.@[13] Thereupon, he kissed the floor, recited the usual prayer, *Sancta Maria,* etc., and got up to leave. But Saint Louise and the Sisters, who were unwilling to accept this deprivation, insisted so strongly that he finished by giving in to them.

When the conference was over, the Sisters would hasten to write it down as faithfully as possible. Those who had been questioned would bring their notes. Saint Vincent himself lent them his outline--at least Saint Louise ventured to ask him for it. AI hope,@ she wrote to him on January 25, 1643, Athat our Sisters will make good use of the instruction Your Charity[14] gave us today. Their hearts are filled with the desire to do this and they would really like to remember it forever. This causes me to entreat you most humbly to send us the little memorandum of the points you had in it. It seems to me that this would help me to recall a large part of what our good God said to us through your mouth.@[15]

The written conference was sometimes, if not always, given to him to indicate any corrections to be made. We have proof of this in the following words he wrote on August 25, 1646, to Saint Louise, who was absent: AEnclosed is a summary of the conference of our dear Sisters, written out by dear Sister Hellot.[16] I just read part of it, and must confess that I shed a few tears in two or three places. If you are not coming soon, send it back to us after you have read it.@[17]

More than half of the notebooks of the conferences written down by the first Sisters have been lost; only fifty-four are extant. In twenty of them, we recognize the handwriting of Saint Louise; in sixteen, that of Élisabeth Hellot; two are by Julienne Loret,[18] and sixteen others by Mathurine Guérin.[19] The other conferences are known to us from copies made at a later date.

The editing of the conferences varies according to the Sister who was doing the writing. Each has her own way of presenting what took place at the meeting, just as each has her particular style. They tried, no doubt, to give an exact rendition of the thinking and even of the words of the Founder; however, since it was impossible to recall verbatim what he had said, they inevitably put some of themselves into what they gave as coming from Saint Vincent.

Saint Louise guarded these manuscripts jealously. Mathurine Guérin testified to this in a report given in 1660 or 1661 to Marguerite Chétif,[20] Superioress of the Company, when she wrote, AOne of the greatest treasures of our Company is the very accurate anthology she compiled and had others compile of the instructions of our late Most Honored Father. . . . She loved those poor manuscripts so much that she wouldn't hear of anyone recopying them, as a good priest from Saint-Lazare wanted to do, for fear that he might change what this blessed Father meant, for she preferred their simple, natural style to more polished language.@[21]

The Superioresses who succeeded Saint Louise inherited her reverence for the writings of her holy Director. Abelly,[22] writing in 1664 about the Daughters of Charity, stated that Athey have collected more than one hundred of these talks of their good Father, which they still read and reread every day in their Motherhouse in order to be nourished by them. They are looking forward to the day when they will be in print so that the Sisters who live farther away may share the fruits of this excellent reading.@[23]

Around 1670, Sister Mathurine Guérin, then at the head of the Company, had the first copy made. AWe owe her a debt of gratitude,@ writes the author of her obituary notice,[24] Afor four thick volumes of conferences of M. Vincent . . . which . . . Mlle Le Gras had collected but didn't have time to edit.@ The author of the notice adds, AIn addition to these, she also recorded the conferences on the virtues of our Sisters who had died.@

From this it would seem that, in these four volumes, none of which has come down to us but must have served as a model for copies made later, Sister Mathurine Guérin did not make a slavish copy of Saint Louise's text. Meanwhile, the Sisters living in the Provinces, like those at the Motherhouse, ardently desired to read the conferences of their holy Founder. Sister Suzanne Parent, Sister Servant at the Angers hospital, expressed this desire to Edme Jolly, Superior General. On January 20, 1677, he replied to her as follows: AThe transcription of the conferences you would like to have is a major, long-term project, and will require time for its completion. Meanwhile, you have plenty of good books to provide you with the benefit you want to draw from reading them.@[25]

Mother Marie Moreau, elected Superioress of the Company on June 4, 1691, took the matter to heart. She consulted Edme Jolly regarding her plan to enlist copyists from the outside; on December 30 of the same year she received the following reply from him: AYou have to be absolutely certain of the reliability of the persons to whom you want to give M. Vincent's conferences to copy, for a man who is in need might not scruple making two copies, and to sell them at a high price to certain curious persons.@[26]

It was around this time that copies of the conferences began to circulate in various houses of the Company. Those that have survived the years enrich the manuscript collection preserved at the Motherhouse.

Given the large number of houses of the Daughters of Charity, it is amazing that these conferences were not printed before the nineteenth century. Were they afraid that copies might fall into the hands of persons outside the Community? This is probable.

The first printed edition is the work of Fr. Bournac, a priest of the Toulouse diocese. Entitled *Conférences de saint Vincent de Paul*, its two volumes contain forty-two conferences on the Rules.[27] The displeasure the publication of this work caused among the children of Saint Vincent was also shown in a note Fr.[Pierre-François] Viguier[28] wrote in the front of the copy preserved in the secretariat of the Congregation of the Mission: AThis edition is repudiated by Fr. [Claude-Joseph] Brunet, Vicar-General of the Congregation of the Mission [1800-06], by his successor, Fr. [François-Florentin] Placiard [1806-07], and by Mother [Antoinette] Deleau [1790-1804]. The manuscripts from which it is taken are incorrect and unreliable. To regard it as the genuine work of Saint Vincent would be to fail him. Paris, September 30, 1803. Viguier, Priest of the Mission.@

This comment is not only severe, it is unjust. If Fr. Viguier had taken the trouble to compare Bournac's text with that of the early collections, he would, on the contrary, have found it, on the whole, accurate.

In 1825, Charles Boujard, who, as Vicar-General [1819-27], was acting head of the two families of Saint Vincent, gave one of his priests the task of completing Bournac's work by having printed fifty unpublished conferences contained in a manuscript collection from the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was very popular in the early nineteenth century, probably because the talks were classified by subject matter, preceded by a summary, and provided with a marginal synopsis of each paragraph.[29]

Since most of these conferences--thirty-nine out of the fifty--are known to us from the original manuscripts, it is very easy to judge the value of this collection. Its author eliminated details that did not suit him or no longer corresponded with the customs of the Daughters of Charity, and even transposed to Saint Vincent's time practices from a later period. Had he known where to draw the line, he might have been excused for touching up the primitive manuscripts. On the one hand, this text gives only an imperfect rendition of Saint Vincent's talks and is in part the work of copyists. On the other hand, it is full of grammatical errors and all sorts of inaccuracies, and many of the sentences are incomplete. Obviously, Saint Vincent did not speak that way. The reading of a text corresponding in every point to that of the manuscripts would have been more fatiguing than interesting and instructive. Sister Mathurine Guérin had understood this; therefore, the first copy made by her, which was the source for later ones, was revised.

Editing a text, however, is not an easy job. The editor has to know how to limit himself or herself to the essential, that is, to respect the contents and, as far as form is concerned, to retain the words and phraseology of the manuscript whenever meaning, grammar, and the French language allow. The author of the manuscript used by the 1825 editor failed badly in that. True, he wasn't trying to produce an historical or critical work, but simply to prepare for the Sisters--and only for the Sisters--an edifying book, which, as a matter of fact, from the practical point of view, has many advantages.

Jean-Baptiste Étienne had scarcely been named Superior General [1843-74], when he asked Jean Grappin, Director of the Sisters, to prepare a new edition of the conferences.[30] Unfortunately, Grappin had neither the competence nor the time needed to carry out well such a difficult and important work. Although his confrere, Jean-Marie Naudin, appointed to

collaborate with him on it, had more time at his disposal, he was no better prepared for this type of work than Grappin. The latter republished, with no modifications, the fifty conferences that were in the 1825 edition. For the forty-three that he added, the text of the manuscripts was revised and corrected. AIn this edition,@ he stated in the introduction, Aby comparing different manuscripts, we were able to eliminate several inaccuracies and a few exaggerations. In each conference, wherever there were grounds for it, order was restored by transposing certain things, often by following what was set forth in the introduction. A few passages were deleted to avoid repetition. Perhaps more could have been done, but, in so doing, there would have been reason to fear diminishing the richness and even the effectiveness of these sorts of repetition.@

Fr. Grappin emended more than he leads us to believe. Almost no sentence in his work is a faithful reproduction of what is written in the manuscript. Even the most correct phrases did not suit him; he changed things for no apparent reason, and what he writes is frequently no improvement on the original. The conferences explaining the Rules, which he revised meticulously, are, in fact, the ones that needed it the least, and there was generally no problem publishing them as they are in the manuscripts, which is what we ourselves will be doing. In addition, for the text of the Rules on which Saint Vincent had commented, he substituted a text from a later revision, with the result that there are discrepancies between the text and his commentary.

Grappin's work came out in 1845. It was his text that was adopted by subsequent editors, who were satisfied with simply adding to the number of conferences. To the ninety-three in 1845 and in 1863,[31] twelve were added in 1881[32] and four more in 1902.[33]

From this point of view, our edition will signal great progress because it contains one hundred twenty conferences.[34] It has another advantage: that of giving the reader a more accurate text. Instead of republishing Grappin's work, whose shortcomings we have just noted, we have preferred to base our text directly on the originals[35] and, when these manuscripts are not available, on the early collections formed from the copy made by Sister Mathurine Guérin. We are not claiming to have added anything to the perfume of edification given off by the conferences of Saint Vincent as we already know them; but we can show that his words are more accurately preserved here, and historical truth better respected.

Note: *This English edition of the Conferences uses an informal, conversational style in order to preserve the spontaneity and simplicity of the exchanges between Saint Vincent and the first Sisters and to provide a translation that appeals to the modern reader.* --Ed.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
CONFERENCES
TO THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

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1. - EXPLANATION OF THE REGULATIONS[1]

July 31, 1634

On the last day of July 1634, in a third and final conference, M. Vincent gave the Rules to the little Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, and an instruction on how to practice them. Following are the notes that were taken:

He knelt down, as did all the Sisters present, and after reciting the *Veni, Sancte,* began in this way, ADear Sisters, when I was speaking to you the other day, I was saying that you=ve been residing together for some time now with the same purpose in view, but so far you haven't had any Regulations for your way of life. In this, Divine Providence has guided you, as God guided His people, who were without a code of laws for more than a thousand years after creation. Our Lord acted in the same way with the early Church; for, as long as He was on earth, there was no new written law; His Apostles were the ones who assembled His teachings and Commandments after He had gone.

AProvidence seems to have brought the twelve of you together here with the intention of honoring His human life on earth. What a blessing to be a member of a Community because each individual shares in the good that is done by all! By this means you'll have more abundant grace. Our Lord promised us this, saying, >Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.=[2] For even greater reason, when several of you have the same intention of serving God, >my Father and I will come and dwell among them,= if they love us. It is for those who have the same spirit and who help one another in this same spirit to honor God that His Son prayed in the last prayer He offered before His Passion. >Father,= He said, >I pray that they may be one, even as we are one.=[3] So, dear Sisters, let's see how you should spend the twenty-four hours that make up the day, as the days make up the months, and the months the years that will lead you to eternity.

AAs far as possible, observe the prescribed times, for it will be a very great consolation to you on rising to think, >All my other Sisters, wherever they may be, are rising now for the service of God.= So, you'll rise at five o=clock, whenever the work of the Charity[4] allows you to go to bed at ten, for you must take care of yourselves for the service of those who are poor, and give your bodies their just due. Your first thought should be of God: thank Him for having preserved you during the night, consider briefly whether you=ve offended Him, and thank Him or ask His forgiveness for this; offer Him all your thoughts, the impulses of your heart, and your words and actions; resolve never to do anything to offend Him, and everything you do during the day will derive its strength from this first offering made to God. For you see, Sisters, if you fail to offer everything to God, you'll lose the reward of your actions. Saint Paul tells you how much you lose when the first thoughts of your mind are filled with anything other than God. When you wake up, the devil does his best to inspire you with other thoughts. That's why you must be imbued with this holy practice, as good Christian women and true Daughters of Charity.

AThe first thing you should do when you=ve risen and have begun to dress is to kneel down and adore God. What do you think it means to adore God? It's to render Him the honor that belongs to Him alone and to acknowledge that He is your Creator and Sovereign Lord. Next, you'll ask for His holy blessing, bowing your head slightly in order to receive it with devotion and with the intention of making all your thoughts, words, and actions pleasing to His Divine Majesty and willing to do all of them for the glory of His most holy love.

AWhen you=ve finished dressing and have made your bed, you'll begin your mental prayer. This is the heart of devotion, Sisters, and you really have to want to accustom yourselves to making it well. No, don't be afraid that poor village girls--ignorant as you think you are--shouldn't aspire to this holy exercise. God is so good, and has already been so good in your regard as to call you to practice charity, so why do you think He'll deny you the grace you need to pray well? Don't let such a thought enter your mind. I was deeply edified today in talking with a good young woman from the country, who is now one of the greatest souls I know!

AAlways begin all your prayers by an act of the presence of God; otherwise, an action will sometimes fail to be pleasing to Him. You see, Sisters, even though we don't see God, faith teaches us that His holy presence is everywhere, and this is one of the means we should propose to ourselves--I mean His presence in all places, permeating everything, even the very depths of our hearts. This is even more true than the thought that we=re all here present because our eyes may deceive us, but the truth that God is everywhere will never deceive us.

AAnother means of placing ourselves in the presence of God is to imagine ourselves before the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar. It's there, dear Sisters, that we receive the most

cherished testimonies of God's love. Let's love Him dearly and remember that, when He was on earth, speaking of His Father and the Holy Spirit, He said, >If anyone loves me, we will come to him,=[5] and souls will be guided by His holy Providence as a ship by its pilot.

ATake care to give an account of your prayer as soon as possible after making it. You can't imagine how useful this will be. Tell one another quite simply the thoughts God has given you and, above all, be careful to remember the resolutions you took at meditation. Blessed Sister Marie de l=Incarnation[6] used this means to make great progress in perfection. She used to give a careful account of her prayer to her maid. Yes, Sisters, you can't imagine how much this will benefit you and the pleasure you'll give to God by acting this way. Just think, dear Saint Mary Magdalen hid in her heart the good thoughts she gathered from Our Lord's words, and the same is said of the Blessed Virgin. The good thoughts God gives you in prayer are relics; gather them carefully in order to put them into practice, and you'll gladden the heart of God; then you'll be the joy of God, and all the saints will celebrate.

AGo to Holy Mass every day, but do so with deep devotion; conduct yourselves in church with great reserve and be an example of virtue to all who see you. I have to give as an example a dear lady named Mme Pavillon, who for many long years has been a source of admiration in her parish.[7] She seems to walk and carry herself as if she's visibly in the presence of God, and appears to be almost unaffected by everything, sin excepted. She would allow herself to be trampled on rather than be diverted from the presence of God. That, Sisters, is how to behave reverently in church, especially during Holy Mass.

AWhat do you intend to do while you=re there? It's not only the priest who offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass but also those who are present at it, and I'm sure that, when you=ve been well instructed, you'll be very devoted to it, for it's the center of devotion.

ARemember that when you leave meditation and Holy Mass to serve poor persons, you lose nothing, Sisters, because to serve those who are poor is to go to God, and you should see God in them. So then, be very careful to attend to all their needs, and be particularly alert to the assistance you can give them for their salvation; don't let them die without the sacraments. You=re not there simply to care for their bodies, but to help them to be saved. Above all, motivate them to make general confessions; put up with their little fits of temper, and encourage them to suffer patiently for the love of God. Never get angry with them, and don't speak to them harshly; they have enough to put up with because of their illness. Imagine that you=re their visible Guardian Angel, their father and mother, and don't contradict them except in those things that are bad for them, for in that case it would be cruelty to give them what they want. Weep with them; God has made you to be their consolers.

AYou see, Sisters, what fidelity you owe to God. The practice of your vocation consists in the frequent remembrance of the presence of God. To make this easy for yourself, take advantage of the reminder given when the clock strikes, and make an act of adoration at that time. To make this act is to say in your heart, >My God, I adore You,= or simply, >My God, You are my God,= >My God, I love You with my whole heart,= >I wish, O my God, that everyone might know and honor You in honor of the contempt You endured on earth.= When you begin these acts, you may close your eyes to recollect yourselves.

ABefore dinner, make the examination of conscience for the time of one or two *Misereres*[8] on the resolutions you took at meditation. As far as possible, these resolutions should be on the practice of some particular virtue and, as a rule, should aim at combating the imperfection to which you=re most inclined; for you see, Sisters, even the most just person falls seven times a

day; some Sisters are subject to vanity, others to unbecoming behavior. That's what you have to work at: overcoming your bad habits. It's essential to be very modest and recollected and to keep guard over your eyes. A glance destroyed David, who was such a good man. It's nearly impossible for a person whose external behavior is improper to be truly unpretentious interiorly. And if you ask me how long you should keep the same resolution, my answer is: as long as you feel inclined toward the vice you=re trying to overcome. Be very careful about using language that is loose and risqué. A good means of being recollected is to reflect often that God sees you.

AMake good use of the free time you have after caring for the sick. Never be idle; apply yourself to learning how to read--not for your own advantage but to be in a position to be sent to places where you could teach. Do you know what Divine Providence wants to do with you? Be always ready to leave whenever holy obedience sends you.

AAfter the evening examination of conscience, keep silence until after meditation the next day so that this recollection, which will appear exteriorly, may foster the conversation of your hearts with God. Keep it especially after the act of adoration you offer to God before going to bed and after having received His holy blessing.

AGo to bed modestly and fall asleep with a good thought. This will be an easy way for you to remember God when you awake, and your mind will be better disposed to make your morning meditation.

AGo to Communion on Sundays, holy days, and certain other feast days, but always with your confessor's permission.

ASince obedience improves all our ministries, there must always be one among you who acts as the Superior. Sometimes it will be one Sister, sometimes another. That's what we do on the missions. Don't you think this is necessary? May God be pleased with your submission to her in honor of His Son's submission to Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin! Be sure, Sisters, that you always consider as the Blessed Virgin the one who holds the place of Superior--even see God in her--in this way you'll benefit more in one month than you=d otherwise do in a year. By being obedient you'll learn holy humility, and by governing through obedience you'll instruct others usefully. To prompt you to practice holy obedience, I=d like to tell you that, when God placed me in the house of the General's wife,[9] I decided to obey her as I would the Blessed Virgin, and God knows that it really helped me! Honor the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity and always treat them with great respect; honor the sick as well and always look on them as your masters.

ASo now, Sister Marie[10] of Saint-Sauveur, you'll be the Superior of your Sister for the whole month; Michelle,[11] the Superior of Barbe[12] at Saint-Nicolas; Marguerite,[13] of her Sisters at Saint-Paul; and you, Sister, at Saint-Benoît, your Guardian Angel will be your guide. For the Hôtel-Dieu,[14] it will be Mlle Le Gras. Be very cordial with one another, and let the Sisters in the other parishes come here from time to time to be aided in putting your Regulations into practice.

AI still have to tell you the good results you'll have from this way of life. The first is that you must believe that if anyone should hope for paradise, it's the Sisters who are faithful to it. And why? Because God has promised this. By observing it, you=re assured that you'll be doing God's most holy Will. Saint Clement[15] felt this way; he used to say that anyone who had lived in a Community and observed its Rule had nothing to fear.

AIn the second place, it's the beginning of a very great blessing that will perhaps last forever. Yes, Sisters, if you begin to observe your Regulations with the intention of doing God's most holy Will, there's great reason to hope that your little Community will survive and grow. However, you should also fear that, if you neglect them and don't live by them, the Community

will disappear entirely. Watch out for that! What a disordered state! It's a question of nothing less than the abandonment of a good work that God has perhaps planned from all eternity and for which He has chosen you! What a happiness if you do it according to His Will! Your Community will last, not only for a time but, when you die, it will be cause for augmenting your glory in heaven.

AIn the third place, perhaps the lives of ten thousand persons depend on your fidelity. How many husbands are back with their wives once again, and how many parents with their children! Maybe you'll be the reason why many persons who might otherwise be lost, will be saved.

ABut how is it that God has chosen you for such a great blessing? It's God's Will to choose simple people. He chose the Apostles to triumph over idolatry and to convert the whole world. Remember, Sisters, that God began the Church with poor people, and say, >Because I am nothing, God has chosen me to render Him a great service. God has so willed it. From my lowly condition I will never forget Him and will always adore His great mercy to me.=

AFourth, consider what a great misfortune it would be if, after God had chosen you for this holy ministry, you should fail Him through your own fault. At the hour of death, God would reproach you, saying, >Go away, you wretched creature; because you didn't obey your Regulations and didn't assist the sick poor, you=ve been the cause of the premature death of many persons and of the disappearance of your Little Company.= Now, because it's a good thing and fitting that it should survive, here are some means:

The first is to ask God for the grace to live in conformity with the little Regulations that have been proposed to you.

AThe second is to take the trouble to do so and make up your mind right now to observe them, saying in your hearts, >Yes, my God, I'm determined to begin to practice those good things you taught us. I know I'm weak, but with Your grace I can do all things, and I feel confident that You'll help me. I implore you by the love that prompts You to teach us Your holy Will, and I beg you to give us the strength and courage to live them.=

AThe third means of observing your Regulations is to live in great cordiality and charity with one another. Persons chosen for the same ministry must also be united in everything. These Sisters have been chosen for the fulfillment of a plan, but the building won't last if you don't cherish one another, and this bond will prevent its destruction. Our Lord said to His Apostles, >If you, my Apostles, want to carry out the plan I have had from all eternity, then have great love for one another.= It's true, Sisters, that you=re weak, but put up with one another's imperfections. If you don=t, the building will collapse, and others will be put in your place. And because there may be antipathies, it would be well if you were changed, with the permission of Superiors and the consent of the Ladies in charge. Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Saint Barnabas certainly had differences among themselves, so it shouldn't be surprising if poor, weak young women have them. You have to be ready to go wherever you=re told to go, and even to request this, saying, >I belong neither here nor there, but wherever God wants me to be.= Don't act like the sons of Zebedee who secretly had places sought for themselves, which God, for their own good, didn't give them. You are chosen to be at the disposition of Divine Providence and, should you be unwilling to submit yourselves entirely to it, you=d lose a great deal.

AAnother means is perfect detachment from father, mother, relatives, and friends so as to belong to God alone. Now, to have this great blessing, you must divest yourselves of all things and have nothing of your own. The Apostles had such detachment. For one écu,[16] you'll have a hundred, and as many mothers as there are Ladies of Charity; Providence will never fail you,

Sisters. Shouldn't you have the courage to give yourselves to God, who thinks so highly of you? Don't try to reserve anything for your own support; always rely on Providence. Rich people can become needy through the accidents that often happen, but those who are willing to depend completely on Providence will never be poor. Isn't it good to live like that, Sisters? What's there to fear? God has promised that those who take care of persons who are poor will never want for anything. Don't you prefer God's promises to the deceits of the world, Sisters? God has committed himself to provide for all your needs.

AThe sixth [*sic*] means is for you to make an annual retreat in order to renew your good resolutions, and each of you will make it at the time and place judged appropriate and wherever obedience sends you. It may well be in this place.

AAnother means to preserve the Company in the exact observance of the Regulations is for each of you to give a monthly account to the person who has the general charge of all of you, and for a brief talk to be given in this house on the blessing of your way of life in order to encourage you. As far as possible, I'll be the one to do this--or one of our priests.

AFor the coming week, Sisters, make the subject of your mental prayer a reflection on the graces you=ve received from God--even from your childhood--and the dangers about which your parents warned you and from which you=ve been rescued by Divine Providence. In order to do this, divide your life into several periods: your Baptism, the other sacraments, and especially your vocation, and say, >When I wasn't even considering it, God was thinking of leading me to a Community that would be a means of salvation for me.= How many graces He wants to grant you in carrying out your ministry! I know someone who was deeply touched by the love of God at the thought of a grace she had received by her birth, without which she might never perhaps have been baptized. You can't imagine how much she has benefited from this. You should say, Sisters, >*Quoi!* from all eternity God thought of doing good for me, even at the time when I hadn't begun to have sentiments of gratitude and thanks!= Reflect in your hearts on what resolution you should choose, and resolve to spend your entire life in observing your Regulations of service to the sick. Continue to do this for a week; then, for the rest of the month, use the meditations in the *Introduction*,[17] and please don't grow weary of this.

ABut, Sisters, all our resolutions are nothing without grace. That's why we really have to ask God to give us strength and set to work courageously. Give yourself to God and to the Blessed Virgin for that intention, and ask the intercession of Saint Louis[18] and the other saints who were so happy to serve God in the way you do.

AWell now, Sisters, think about God's mercy in choosing you to be the first persons for this foundation. When Solomon wanted to build God's temple, he placed precious stones in the foundation to show the excellence of what He was trying to do. May God in His goodness grant you, the foundation stones of this Company, the grace of being eminent in virtue! For, by failing to be virtuous, you would do harm to all those who come after you, if God is pleased to bless this beginning. Just as trees bear fruit only according to their seed, those who come after you will probably not aspire to greater virtues than the ones you=ve practiced.@

All the Sisters then declared that they wanted to follow the advice they had heard and to live according to the Regulations given them. Everyone knelt down, and M. Vincent added, AMay God in His goodness imprint upon your hearts what I, a wretched sinner, have just told you on His behalf, so that you may be able to remember it well in order to put it into practice, and that you may be truly Daughters of Charity. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

2. - THE VOCATION OF A DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

July 5, 1640

AThe subject of this conference is the happiness of Daughters of Charity: in what it consists, and what you must do to be good, true Daughters of Charity.

AThe happiness of Christians consists in remaining always in the state that makes them most pleasing to God so that there's nothing that can displease Him.

ATwo sorts of persons in the world may be in this state: some are in their own homes and attend only to the care of their families and the observance of the Commandments; the others are those whom God calls to the state of perfection, such as religious in every Order and even those He places in Communities, such as the Daughters of Charity who, although they don't have vows to sustain them for the present, are, nevertheless, in that state of perfection, if they=re true Daughters of Charity.

ANow, to be true Daughters of Charity, it's necessary to have left everything: father, mother, possessions, and the hope of establishing a household. This is what the Son of God teaches in the Gospel. We also have to renounce ourselves; for, if we leave all things, but retain our own wills and don't renounce ourselves, nothing has been done. To be Daughters of Charity is to be daughters of God, daughters belonging entirely to God; for whoever is in charity is in God and God in her. We must do God's Will in its entirety by observing God's Commandments and those of Holy Church, obeying our Superiors, observing our Regulations, and preserving uniformity. Yes, Sisters, we have to work at that with all our might.

AUrgent business has kept me until now from helping you, but the remorse of conscience I often feel about this has made me take the resolution to speak to you every two weeks on this subject. So, we have to review your Regulations and make sure that, although you may be in different places, your spiritual exercises, meditation, and prayers before meals will still take place at the same time.

ALet's go on to the means of being good Daughters of Charity. You should often ask God for this in all your prayers, and offer all your actions to God for this intention; for, of yourselves, you can't have this great blessing. You, simple country women, swineherds as I was, we should never presume on our own strength.

AA second means is to have the will to be true Daughters of Charity. Don't all of you desire this? Aren't you determined right now to be so?@

After M. Vincent had the consent of all present he added, AMake an act of this right now; all of you, and say in your hearts, >Yes, my God, I desire with all my heart and I resolve to be a true Daughter of Charity with the help of Your holy grace.= That's how interior acts, like those of faith, hope, and charity, are made.

ATo be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth. And what did He do mainly? After submitting His Will and obeying the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation. How fortunate you are, Sisters, to be called to a state of life so pleasing to God! In addition, however, you must take great care not to abuse this and strive to become more perfect in this holy state of life. You, poor village girls and daughters of workmen, have the happiness of being among the first women called to this holy ministry. Since the time of the women who served the Son of God and the Apostles, no Community has been established in God's Church for this purpose. Humble yourselves profoundly and make up your minds to strive to be perfect and holy, for you shouldn't hope that those who come after you to

follow your example will be better than you because, as a rule, like produces like. So don't demean your state of life--or rather, don't dishonor it; don=t, by your example, be the reason that unsatisfactory young women are entrusted with such a noble ministry.@

Since, in the course of time, the Sisters had developed habits injurious to their perfection, two questions were asked, the first one being whether they offended God by complaining of one another. M. Vincent replied that nothing destroyed union and charity more than this fault, and that, in the olden days, in a certain Community of men, when the religious used to visit one other, their first words were, ABrother, tell me something edifying.@ AIn like manner,@ added Most Honored Father, Awhen you visit each other, be careful to say nothing that may cause scandal. If you=re Daughters of Charity, you must first of all have charity among yourselves. Isn't this what you=d want?@ And, asking this of all those present, he had them promise to excuse one other.

He was then asked if, when they=re discontented either with their Superiors, their ministry with the sick, or at home, or when they experience temptation and sadness, or their troubles make them think of leaving the Charity, it's all right for the Sisters to console one another; and if, when the Superior or Superioress has been told of their failings, they may state their suspicions about certain Sisters, become angry, and speak ill of them.

Regarding the first point, our Most Honored Superior M. Vincent led us to see that venting one's feelings in this way is contagious, and Sisters who seek relief in this manner infect others and perhaps wound them mortally. If the latter murmur and leave the Charity, those who have offended them by their bad example will answer before God for all the glory the others might have given Him, for all the assistance they might have rendered to poor persons, and for all the good they might have done in the Company. In this we saw the magnitude of this evil, and how carefully it had to be avoided.

As to being reminded of one's failings, M. Vincent said, ASisters, not only should you not be angry when you know one of your actions has been reported to your Superiors, but you should desire it. How do you think all religious Orders and Communities act in this matter? Without this benefit they couldn't survive. How could a Superior guide his men without this help, if they=re more or less a hundred leagues[1] away? How could we, in our houses and parishes, guide you without these admonitions? You can rest assured that this is absolutely necessary and one of the best practices in Communities! A Superior or Superioress with a great deal to do couldn't know what goes on in the house without this means. So then, Sisters, don't you think it's necessary?@ They all admitted that it was, and promised not to complain or find fault with it in future nor vent their feelings to others.

AWell now, Sisters, may God be blessed for the good resolutions you=ve just taken to serve Him! They'll help you to grow more exemplary in the vocation to which He has called you. I beg the Divine Goodness to give you the graces necessary to keep them and to unite yourselves ever more perfectly in His holy love. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

3. - THE VOCATION OF DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

July 19, 1640

On Thursday, July 19, 1640, M. Vincent gave us the second conference on the vocation of the Daughters of Charity and began as follows: AWell now, here we are, Sisters, gathered together again to talk about the excellence of your vocation and to help you to understand it well, to make up for the faults into which constant business has caused me to fall, by putting off too

long instructing you on what you should know on this matter. Perhaps, dear Sisters, the justice of God will punish me for it in purgatory, but I do have one consolation, namely, that for the ten to twelve years that your Company has been in existence, you=ve honored the way the Son of God acted in establishing His Church, for He spent thirty years of His life without appearing in public, ministering for only three years, and left nothing in writing to His Apostles. You=ve been guided by tradition in everything you=ve done these past years, Sisters, but, with the help of God, for the future you'll have your little Rules. So, the object of this talk will be to help you to know God's plan in establishing the Daughters of Charity, for all the workers in the world have some plan in their works. God himself has never done anything without a plan. His design in establishing the Capuchins was to form men who would teach penance by their example. He raised up the Carthusians to honor His solitude and to sing His praises, the Jesuits to lead an apostolic life, and so on for the others. We have to look, therefore, at God's plan in establishing you. You, women wearing your poor headdress, aren't you deeply consoled and amazed at the same time at such a great grace from God? You don't realize this yet, but some day you will. So, have great respect for the plan God has had for you from all eternity in this regard, and, although it may seem insignificant to you at this time--almost nothing--know that it's a very important one, since it's to love, serve, and honor the life of His Son on earth.

ABut perhaps, Sisters, you don't know how one can love God above all things. I'm going to tell you how: it's to love Him more than anything else--more than father, mother, relatives, friends, or any creature whomsoever; it's to love Him more than ourselves for, if something were to arise contrary to His glory and Will, or were it necessary to die for Him, it would be far better to die than to act contrary to His glory and His pure love.

ASee what a great plan God has for you, Sisters, and what a grace He gives you in allowing you already to serve so many poor people in so many different places! That requires different kinds of Regulations. The Sisters in Angers have theirs; one kind will be needed for those ministering with poor little children, another for those who care for the poor persons at the Hôtel-Dieu, another for the Sisters who serve the poor in the parishes, another for those with the poor convicts, and still another for those who remain at home, whom you should look upon and love as your own family. And all these Rules should be based on the general Rule, about which I=d like to speak with you.

AProvidence has permitted that the very first words of your Rule read as follows: >The Company of the Daughters of Charity is established to love and serve God, and to honor Our Lord their Patron and the Blessed Virgin.= And how will you honor Him? Your Rule tells you, for it goes on to make known to you God's plan in establishing your Company: >To serve the sick poor corporally by supplying them with all they need; and spiritually by seeing that they live and die in a good state.= So you see, Sisters, you may do all the good you like, but if you don't do it well, it will profit you nothing. Saint Paul taught us this: give all your goods to the poor, but if you don't have charity, you=re doing nothing; no, not even should you give your lives. We must imitate the Son of God, dear Sisters, who did nothing except from the motive of the love He had for God His Father. So, your intention in coming to the Charity should be to come here purely for the love and pleasure of God; and, as long as you remain in it, all your actions should tend to that same love.

AThe first and surest means of acquiring this love is to ask God for it and to have a strong desire to obtain it. What use would it be to carry soup or medicines to poor persons if the motive for such an action wasn't love? That was the motive of all the actions of the Blessed Virgin, of

the good women who ministered to poor persons under the guidance of our holy [Mother] and the Apostles, like Saint Magdalen, Saint Martha, Saint Mary, Salome, Susanna, and Saint Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, of whom you=re so fortunate as to be the successors.

AYou also honor the Son of God by seeing that the sick poor are always in a good state, that is, in the grace of God. What an honor and consolation for you, Sisters--who of yourselves could never hope to perform great acts of charity nor be able to assist in the salvation of souls--that God has given you such an easy means to serve their bodies! To do this for the love of God wouldn't suffice for you for, among those whom you may serve, there will be many who are God's enemies because of the sins they have been committing for such a long time and the ones they will perhaps want to commit after their illness, if you don't try to change them from being God's enemies to being His friends by true penance. That's why it's essential, Sisters, for you to be aware that, from all eternity, God's plan for your establishment has been that you honor Him by doing your utmost in the service of souls to make them friends of God, that is, by taking great care to dispose them to receive the sacraments, doing so even before concerning yourselves with their physical care. You should speak to them with such charity and kindness that they see that only God's glory and their own salvation prompt you to talk to them on such matters. Point out to them the importance of receiving the sacraments in dispositions that may benefit their souls and, when they have been reconciled with God, tell them that there won't be a single moment of their lives, nor a single suffering, that God won't accept and reward, even should they not die for another fifty years.

AWhile they=re ill, take great care to prepare them for death, and to take resolutions to lead a good life if God allows them to recover. In that way, Sisters, from being enemies of God, as they were, they will become God's friends. What a consolation for you in paradise, if you=re so fortunate to see there those souls who, by their presence, will increase the glory with which God will reward you!

AAnd that's not all. God has another plan, dear Sisters: that of your own perfection; for what good will it do you, Sisters, to win all souls for God if you lose your own? On the other hand, how can you strive for your own perfection when you have so much to do? Your Rule will teach you how, since the second article tells you to love one another like sisters whom Jesus Christ has united by the bond of His love. Isn't that a very compelling motive? Sisters, it would be a great deal to say, >Love one another like sisters,= but it would clutch you by the heart completely to say to you >Like sisters whom Jesus Christ has united by the bond of His love.= See how obligated you are to love one another, dear Sisters, if you don't want to run the risk of spurning the great grace God has bestowed on you in giving you the vocation of His dearest friends!

AThis holy love, dear Sisters, couldn't allow you to harbor any bitterness of heart toward one another. So, should it happen that you have any of this bitterness or give bad example to one another, ask each other's forgiveness immediately--a forgiveness that comes from a loving heart that is anxious to please God, to love Him, to love one another for love of Him, and to bear with one another in your little difficulties and natural shortcomings.

AAnother means to improve yourselves is mortification of the senses. What a great secret Saint Paul reveals to us in one of his Epistles when, speaking to the people he had instructed, he says, >My very dear brothers, I have to speak to you of very lowly, humiliating things, but you must mortify your members so that, just as they have served iniquity, they may now serve justice.=[1] I say the same to you, dear Sisters: mortify your senses and you'll soon find a change in yourselves and great facility in doing good. We have five exterior and three interior senses. The

exterior ones are sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. They are so many windows by which the world, the flesh, and the devil may gain entrance into your hearts.

AThat's why you should begin with sight: accustom yourselves to keep your eyes moderately cast down, for, since you'll be serving laypersons, your reserved attitude should not be so severe as to scare them off. That might hinder you from doing the good that moderate cheerfulness could accomplish. Simply abstain from staring too long and too fixedly into the eyes of men or women, and from certain provocative glances that are highly dangerous and whose damage is not immediately perceived. You can also mortify this sense in church, in the streets, and on many occasions when your curiosity is aroused, by averting your gaze from all these objects for love of God.

AOur sense of smell also needs to be mortified, either by willingly enduring offensive odors when they present themselves, without being squeamish, especially when you=re with your sick poor, and also by refraining from pleasant odors when you are able to smell some; but this shouldn't be obvious.@

M. Vincent was asked if there was any merit in refraining from putting fragrance on one's linen or dresses. Since he couldn't even conceive of anyone having such very vain ideas, he showed great surprise, and this amazement was almost his only reply. Nevertheless, he added that it would be a very great fault for a Daughter of Charity even to entertain such an idea.

AWe can also mortify our sense of taste very frequently, even if only by taking the piece of bread we least fancy; by going to meals without manifesting the keen appetite we may sometimes have; by not eating between meals; and by not taking what is most pleasing to our taste, or taking only part of what we=re allowed to eat.

AThe sense of hearing is another dangerous window by which what is said to us sometimes takes such a strong hold on our hearts that countless disorders ensue. Watch out for that, Sisters. Charity is often greatly endangered because of the senses. That's why you should mortify them as far as possible. Don't willingly listen to slander, but turn adroitly away from spiteful words and anything that might unnecessarily wound your hearts or even your senses.

AThe fifth is the sense of touch. We mortify it by refraining from touching our neighbor and not allowing others to touch us for sensual pleasure--not merely our hands, but any other part of our body.

The practice of such mortification, Sisters, will be a great help to you in becoming perfect and fulfilling God's plan in establishing your Community. Strongly encourage one another in this. Another benefit resulting from it is that you'll give others good example; for, although it's a great thing to teach by words, dear Sisters, example has quite another power over hearts. Saint Francis[2] was well aware of this. One day he said to one of his Brothers, >Let's go and preach,= and then he simply walked through the town with him. When, as they were heading back home, the Brother said to him, >But you didn't preach,= the Saint replied, >Oh yes, Brother, our demeanor and recollection were a sermon for those people.= So then, Sisters, please be recollected and work earnestly at your perfection. Don't be content with doing good, but do it in the way God wants, that is, as perfectly as you can, thereby becoming worthy servants of the poor.

AI was deeply consoled a few days ago, dear Sisters, and I really must share this with you! I heard the vow formula of the Hospitaler Monks of Italy read aloud; it ran as follows: >I . . . vow and promise to God to observe all my life poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to serve our lords the poor.= Just imagine how pleasing it is to God, Sisters, to honor His dear members the poor in

this way.@

The fervor with which M. Vincent read the words of these vows prompted some Sisters to express their feelings. Referring to the happiness of those good religious, who gave themselves entirely to God in that way, they asked whether, in our Company, some Sisters might be allowed to make a similar act.

AYes, indeed, Sisters,@ His Charity replied, Abut with this difference: since the vows of those good religious are solemn, not even the Pope can dispense them from them; but the ones you might make could be dispensed by the Bishop. Still, it would be better not to make them at all than to have the intention of obtaining a dispensation whenever you wished.@

To the question, AWould it be well for Sisters to make them privately and from devotion?@ His Charity answered that we should be very careful about that, but if anyone wished to do so, she should mention it to her Superiors and, after that, remain at peace, whether they permit or refuse it.

Moved with great fervor, M. Vincent began to raise his heart and eyes to heaven and said the following words, A >O my God, we give ourselves entirely to you. Grant us the grace to live and die in the perfect observance of true poverty. I ask you this for all our Sisters absent and present.= Don't you want to do so, Sisters? >Grant us also the grace to live and die chastely. I ask this favor for all the Daughters of Charity and for myself as well, and that of living in the perfect observance of obedience. We likewise give ourselves to you, my God, to honor and serve our lords the poor all our lives, and we ask this grace of you through your holy love.= Don't you also desire this, dear Sisters?@

All our Sisters gave their consent very willingly and devoutly, and went on their knees. M. Vincent gave us his customary blessing, asking God to grant us the grace of fully accomplishing His plan. Blessed be God!

4. - FIDELITY TO RISING AND MENTAL PRAYER

August 2, 1640

At the meeting held on Thursday, August 2, 1640, when M. Vincent noticed that some Sisters had absented themselves without a good excuse, he began by pointing out to us the importance of persevering in the vocation to which God has called us.

AYou see, Sisters, we must be very careful not to lose any opportunity of perfecting ourselves. You=ve seen that God's plan in calling you to the Daughters of Charity is to sanctify you in order to honor God's Will and that of His Son, who spent thirty years working on earth before instructing and healing the sick poor. So, dear Sisters, you should work seriously. It's not enough to bear the name of Daughters of Charity--that is, daughters of God--you must also seize the opportunities to learn the means of improving yourselves, such as the conferences, which are all aimed at that. God so earnestly desires you to follow and carry out the vocation to which He's calling you that, as one great saint has said, if your father and mother were to throw themselves across the threshold to prevent your departure, step over them. >But they=re my parents,= you'll say. Never mind, step over them. With even greater reason, dear Sisters, do you have to overcome any difficulty that may arise to prevent you from becoming perfect Daughters of Charity. >But it's the Superioress of my parish.= Even should it be your confessor, you must still go ahead.

AWe'll begin this conference, Sisters, by speaking of the necessity of putting everything in order. You see that God's order is manifested both in nature and in grace; you see how all the seasons never fail to follow one other, how day follows night, how birds have their winter and

summer migrations; how plants bring forth flowers and fruits in due season. Lastly, dear Sisters, if we don't follow our Rules, we won't do anything worthwhile, for disorder is the road to perdition. It's said of hell, which is the place of perdition, that there's no order there, but only everlasting horror and disorder.

AYou will rise punctually at five o=clock. The entire daily schedule depends on this first action. Be courageous in forming this habit; it isn't very difficult to do provided you=re healthy and have had sufficient sleep during the night, which should be seven hours. If some weakness prevents this, then we should make up in the morning the time we haven't slept during the night.@

M. Vincent was then asked whether a Sister may stay in bed in the morning if she has been kept awake at night by some slight pain or other disturbance or if, through her own fault, she didn't get to bed on time, or if, being slightly infirm, she usually doesn't fall asleep until morning.

ASisters,@ replied M. Vincent, Ait's not reasonable that Sisters should rise late if they haven't had a good night's rest through their own fault; that would be a continual disorder and a departure from the order in which God wants us to be. They have to be careful to conform to the hours prescribed by the Rule. Furthermore, there would be reason to fear that nature would grow accustomed to this morning sleep--which it would infallibly do.

AI'll tell you quite simply what I do. Often I don't sleep at night but, unless fever obliges me to provoke a sweat, I always rise at four o=clock, which is the time fixed for the community, for I know from experience that I=d easily grow accustomed to getting up later. That's why, dear Sisters, you have to do a little violence to yourselves; then you'll find it very easy because our bodies are donkeys; when they=re used to one road, they always take it. And to make this habit easy, go to bed regularly at the same time.@

When someone pointed out to M. Vincent that Sisters working in parishes are liable to receive visitors, sometimes poor persons and at other times neighbors, who interfere with their spiritual exercises and are the reason why they can't always get to bed on time, he replied, ALook, Sisters, you must be generous in seeking perfection through the exact observance of your Rules. Tell the people who come to see you at the times when you should be at some community exercise, >This is our meal time,= or >This is the time we go to bed.= If you say this in a gracious manner, you won't vex them; on the contrary, you'll edify them. God will be glorified by it because you'll be faithful to Him in this matter, and you'll derive great advantage from it for your perfection.

ASo, having risen at five o=clock, adore God on your knees, offer yourselves to His goodness, thank Him for all His graces, and ask Him for His holy blessing. Then get dressed, make your beds, and at half-past five begin your meditation. Have a deep love for this holy exercise of mental prayer, Sisters, and go to it with the greatest care, for it's the seed bed of all devotion.

AIn this respect, I must tell you how edified I was recently by a President,[1] who made his retreat with us about a year ago. Speaking to me about the little examination of conscience he had made on his rule of life, he said that, by the grace of God, he thought he had failed to make his meditation only twice. >But do you know, Monsieur, how I make my meditation? I foresee what I'll have to do during the day and take my resolutions accordingly. I'll go to the Courts of Justice; I'll have to plead such and such a case; perhaps I'll meet some person of rank who may, by his advice, try to corrupt me. With the help of God's grace, I'll be very much on my guard

against that. Perhaps someone will offer me a present which I=d very much like to have; I won't take it! If I feel inclined to rebuff somebody, I'll speak to him kindly and graciously.=

AWell, Sisters, what do you think of that sort of prayer? Aren't you deeply edified by the perseverance of that good President, who could excuse himself on account of his many business affairs and yet does not because of his desire to be faithful in keeping his resolutions? And you, dear Sisters, aren't you courageous enough to try to follow God's plan to perfect you by the practice of your Rule? You can make your prayer in this way, which is the best way; for you shouldn't make it in order to have exalted ideas, ecstasies, and raptures--which are more harmful than useful--but only to perfect yourselves and make you truly good Daughters of Charity.

So, your resolutions should be something like this, >I'm going to serve some poor persons; I'll try to go to them with a simple, cheerful attitude to comfort and edify them; I'll speak to them as if they were my lords. There are some persons who seldom speak to me; I'll put up with it; I have the habit of saddening a Sister on such and such an occasion; I won't do it. She sometimes displeases me; I'll bear with it. One Lady scolds me, another finds fault with me; I'll try not to fail in my duty and will show them the honor and respect I owe them. When I'm with a certain person, it's nearly always harmful to my perfection; as far as possible, I'll avoid that situation.= I think that's how you should make your meditation, Sisters. Don't you think this method is helpful and easy?@ All the Sisters thought so, and Most Honored Father added, AWell then, dear Sisters, please practice it in this way.@

When some pointed out the difficulty they experienced in making their prayer, he replied, AFor a long time, a lady I knew[2] had the practice in all her meditations of contemplating a picture of the Blessed Virgin. First, she would look at her eyes and then say in her own mind, >O beautiful eyes, how pure you are! You never did anything but glorify God. What purity is apparent in your holy eyes! How different from mine, by which I=ve so often offended my God! I don't want to give them so much liberty any longer but, on the contrary, I'll accustom them to modesty=.@

AAnother time, she=d look at her mouth and say, >O holy mouth, how often you opened yourself to give praise to God and to teach and edify your neighbor! You never did it to commit sin. How different from mine, which has always done the opposite! Holy Virgin, by God's grace and your charity I am trying to watch more closely over my words and especially to avoid certain speech that gives bad example and saddens my neighbor.= In this way, point by point, that lady contemplated the Blessed Virgin, and it served her for many years as a subject for mental prayer.@

M. Vincent's attention was called to the fact that sometimes the two Sisters who minister in a parish didn't know how to read, and he was asked if it would be well for them to confine themselves to the principal mysteries of the life and Passion of Our Lord, which they had heard about more often. AThat would be excellent, Sisters,@ he replied, Abut on feast days it would be well for you to meditate on the Gospels that are read at that time. And you can learn these Gospels by spending a long time in this house, for Sisters should love the place where they=re formed to be capable of working for the sanctification of others and in the service of the poor. I=ve known persons who could neither read nor write, yet made their prayer perfectly well. To be truly learned, dear Sisters, it suffices for you to love God.

ABut some Sisters will say to me that books and knowledge are a great help. If that's what you think, you=re deceiving yourselves. One day a Franciscan Brother said to Saint Bonaventure, >How fortunate you are, Father, to be so learned and to make your prayer so well! What a help

that must be to you!= >Brother,= he replied, >to make our prayer well we don't need knowledge; it's enough to love God well. The poorest old woman and the most ignorant Brother, if they love God, make their meditation better than I do.= This so delighted the good Brother that he leaped for joy and said, >So, let us ignorant folk love God well, and we will make our meditation well.=

AWhen someone else asked Saint Thomas in what books he found his lofty, beautiful concepts of God, he received this reply, >If I may, Monsieur, I'll take you to my library,= and Saint Thomas brought him before his crucifix, telling him that it was the only thing he studied.

ADear Sisters, those of you who don't know how to read would do well, until you=ve learned the Gospels of the feast days of the year, to dwell on the Passion of Our Lord. The Franciscan Friars never have any other subject for their mental prayer. It has occurred to me that using pictures would be very helpful to you. You saw how useful that was to the lady I mentioned. Get some fairly large pictures of the principal mysteries of the life and Passion of Our Lord; and in the evening after the examination of conscience, instead of reading something, the Superior should show one of these pictures to her Sister and say, >Sister, we'll make this the subject of our meditation tomorrow.= Then she should put it in the room where they=re to meet the following morning. If thoughts fail you, look at the picture and use the method of that good lady. In addition, don't forget the President's method for your resolutions, which should be the principal point of your meditation.@

A few Sisters then complained about forgetting their resolutions or about something else, but M. Vincent said to them, ASisters, I also knew another very virtuous lady living in the world who used to carry a little picture in her sleeve. She would take it out, without anyone noticing, look at it, say a little prayer, and quietly replace it. This practice kept her strongly attached to the presence of God. I ask you, too, to accustom yourselves to this holy presence, which is extremely necessary for you. You'll find in it a great aid for your perfection. There are different ways of practicing it: you can see God in the heavens and reflect that He's everywhere, or in each creature you see, or even in your own heart.@

Some Sisters stated that it was difficult for them to make their meditation before going out to take medicine to the sick, especially in summer because of the heat. ADear Sisters,@ said M. Vincent, Aalways do whatever you can so that, prayer being your first occupation, your mind may be filled with God for the rest of the day. It's true that you must prefer the service of the poor to this in case of necessity, but, if you=re careful, you'll find plenty of time for both. The sick are rarely purged during extremely hot weather. The devil does all he can to keep us from making meditation because he's well aware that, if he's the first to fill our mind with frivolous thoughts, he'll be the master of it all day long. So I urge you as strongly as I can, Sisters, to make your prayer before going out and to make it together. If, however, you=re legitimately prevented, you can make it later in church, but this should be as rarely as possible. Please be exact about this holy exercise; share with one another how you=ve spent your prayer time, and especially your resolutions, which you should mention quite simply.@

After listening to some Sisters who complained about sleeping during mental prayer, M. Vincent added, AYou must be really on your guard against this temptation because it's a common one. True, sleeping at prayer may be the result of a bad night or too much work the previous day, but that's the exception. If sleeping during prayer should become habitual, then, to break the habit, stand up, or kiss the floor, or bring back your attention from time to time because, if we don't find a cure for it, it will recur daily. Are you aware that there's a devil whose job it is to put people to sleep when they=re at prayer? He stirs up bodily humors in such a

way that they send vapors to the head that put people to sleep.

AWell now, Sisters, I ask God to sanctify you by the practice of your Rules, to grant you the grace to imitate His Son, who willed to work for thirty years before going to teach His neighbor, and to give you His holy blessing for this purpose. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.@

5. - FIDELITY TO RISING AND MENTAL PRAYER

August 16, 1640

On Thursday, August 16, 1640, feast of Saint Roch,[1] M. Vincent said, ASisters, although I'm the most contemptible sinner in the world, it has pleased God in His goodness that I should come to speak to you on His behalf, and I ask Him that it may be for His glory and your edification. I had promised myself that I=d give you your little Regulations today, but some business has prevented me from doing so. I was nearly unable to come at all today because I had to go far into the city; therefore, I won't have much time to talk to you.@

The oldest Sister[2] reminded him that at the end of the last meeting it was stated that, since the subject concerned our practices, it would be well to begin by a review. So, M. Vincent went back once again to the points, beginning with rising at five o=clock, and questioned the Sisters one after the other. By the grace of God no one was failing in this matter.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! Keep it up because to begin is nothing. And mental prayer? If possible, you should never miss it. Do you remember that good President's method?@ Some Sisters said they had practiced it. AThat doesn't mean, Sisters, that we should spend all our prayer time looking ahead at what we have to do and how to do it well. But the subject for meditation must be considered; converse with God about it, and do so for His love, which I'm sure you'll always cherish deeply. Direct your resolutions toward the day's activities, especially those that will help you tend to perfection and the fulfillment of your Rule, the better to honor God in your vocation.

A*Eh bien*! Sisters, we said at the last meeting that one means of leading a well-regulated life is to be diligent in what you have to do outside the house, not lingering anywhere, and sending away persons--no matter what their social class--who come to your house at the times prescribed for your spiritual exercises. Are you doing this?@ Since this was a very difficult point, M. Vincent added, APlease don't fail in this, dear Sisters, because on it depends the practice of your Regulations. Sometimes, out of timidity, a Sister won't dare to say to her companion, >Sister, it's time for us to leave.= This is the way you should act: there are two of you; imitate the conduct of soldiers in wartime. One is usually more submissive than the other. The one who is less so sees to what has to be done. In the same way, those among you who, either by character or by virtue, are more decisive, should take charge of putting a stop to the hindrances arising from conversations outside the house, but you should do so gently and charitably. Above all, the other Sister mustn't offer any resistance to this, even if she's better acquainted than her companion with the persons who have to be sent away.@

In reply to the question of whether the Daughters of Charity could receive women friends in their rooms and even invite them to sleep there, M. Vincent said, ASisters, be careful never to invite anyone into your rooms under any pretext whatsoever; that would be very dangerous.@

AMonsieur,@ said a Sister, Aplease tell us how we can practice the devotion of that lady Your Charity mentioned the last time--the one who kept a picture of the Blessed Virgin in her sleeve.@

AYou can do it this way: at the beginning of any action or conversation, and from time to

time throughout the day, touch the rosary that hangs on your belt, or the medal or crucifix attached to it. Raise your heart to God and say to Him, >My God, may I speak this word or do this action for your glory and love.= @

Most Honored Father wanted to know if the Sisters remembered this action of the lady. Some said they did and had begun to practice it. Marguerite Lauraine, the young Sister who was serving poor persons in Saint-Laurent parish at that time, told us how, when she was passing through the square where silly tricks and games were being played during the fair,[3] she wanted to go back to watch some of them, but, instead of yielding to this, she held the crucifix of her rosary and said, AO my God, it's much better to look at you than at the follies of the world.@

AGod bless you, Sister! That's what should be done. Do you think, dear Sisters, that this good Sister did little or nothing by acting like that? Oh, she did something great! And what did she do? She pierced the heavens and sent a dart of love into the heart of God. God himself tells us so, >A short, fervent prayer pierces the clouds.=[4] Those darts of love are very pleasing to God and, consequently, are highly recommended by the holy Fathers, who realized their importance. That's why I urge you, Sisters, to accustom yourselves to make them and to think often of your obligation to work at your perfection in your way of life. You don't realize its grandeur. I can't tell you enough, Sisters, that it's one of the greatest in the Church, after that of the Nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu,[5] of whom I'll speak to you some day. Isn't your heart touched when you think, >*Quoi*! God has chosen me, a poor country woman, for such a holy ministry! He passed by my mother, all my relatives, and so many others in my village, and cast His eyes on Geneviève, Jeanne, Marie, etc., to be the first! What a great grace of God! O guidance of Divine Providence, you will be forever blessed!= This thought, dear Sisters, will surely give you the desire for great perfection.

AI think we spoke at the last meeting of how gracious you should be with one another. I recommended that you not allow in your hearts anything that might displease your companions, and never give bad example to one another. Remember, dear Sisters, that this is the bond of your union, which is so necessary for you. Be faithful to this practice and you'll see what great good will result from it. It will, in particular, prevent many complaints that often occur if we=re not very careful about this. No one displeases God more than a grumbler. What does a murderer do? He kills the body of a person whose soul is perhaps happy in heaven. But, I ask you, what does a grumbler do? Far worse! He doesn't kill the body, but with a single word he may perhaps kill many souls. Yes, Sisters, a Sister who would tell another of the annoyance caused her by the Superior or her Superioress, or who would complain of being kept in a place she doesn't like, or who might feel tempted to leave and would say so, criticizing those who may have been the cause of her discouragement; yes, Sisters, I tell you that such a person would be worse than a murderer. The poor Sisters who listen to her will be dismayed by all those complaints and will start to grumble more themselves, grow weary of their situation and, in the end, will abandon their vocation, by which God intended to save and sanctify them. Isn't that poor Sister, who was the first to complain, the cause of the loss of all the rest? And what could she do to restore to those poor souls the life she's taken from them? Don't you see that such a Sister, if--God forbid!--there were any, would be worse than a murderess, since the life of the body is nothing in comparison with that of the soul.

A >But,= you'll say to me, >what will such a poor discontented Sister do?= Do you know what she should do, Sisters? She should come to see me--me or your Superioress--to tell either one of us her troubles; and, instead of listening to her, her companion should say, >In God's

name, Sister, let's remember that we=re Daughters of Charity; as such, we shouldn't complain of anything and should love our Sisters cordially.=

AWell then, Sisters, since you=ve been chosen to imitate the holy life of the crucified Jesus on earth, may He be pleased to obtain for you from God His Father all the graces you need to be true Daughters of Charity! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

6. - EXPLANATION OF THE REGULATIONS

August 16, 1641

AHere we are, dear Sisters, meeting once again by God's grace. I should have brought you together long ago but was prevented mainly by my own wretchedness and my business affairs. Well, Sisters, I hope that God's goodness itself has made up for what I should have done for you. That same goodness is allowing us to meet on the feast of Saint Roch, one of the saints to whom you should have great devotion because he spent his life in the practice of charity, to the point of contracting a contagious disease from the plague-stricken whom he was nursing for the love of God. How fortunate you are, Sisters, that God has called you to such a holy ministry! Some among you care for the sick poor so fervently that they gladly expose themselves to the same danger as good Saint Roch. Our dear Sisters in Angers went into the tainted atmosphere of the hospital, and even ministered to patients who had the plague with as much ease as they attended to other patients. It seemed as if they were immune to the plague, for they nursed everyone without exception.

AOh, Blessed be God! Blessed be God! Blessed be God, dear Sisters! That is indeed the charity the Holy Spirit teaches us when the Spirit says that there's no greater love than to lose one's soul--that is, one's life--for love of the neighbor. How holy is our state of life, dear Sisters! For isn't it true that our greatest happiness is to be loved by God? Nothing can give you greater assurance of this than the practice of what is required by your state of life, and that's what you=re doing, dear Sisters, for there can be no greater charity than to risk one's life for the neighbor. And isn't that what you do every day by your ministry? How fortunate you are!

ABe very grateful for this grace and take great pains to preserve it; and, in order to do so, be faithful in the exact observance of your little Regulations, whether you=re inside or outside the house. How risky it is, Sisters, to put yourself in danger of losing it! Avoid every occasion of doing so, in order to escape the misfortune into which those souls fall who spurn their vocation and abandon God's service. Do you know what happens to them? Abandoned by God, they commit the most serious faults and are at the mercy of their senses. I can't explain this state better to you than by telling you what happens to a wretched priest, who, because he's made himself unworthy of his sacred character by notorious misdeeds, has incurred the penalty of being defrocked. Look at what the Bishop does; he removes the chalice from his hands with words of execration; then the stole, while reproaching him for his unworthiness; next, the maniple and the other priestly vestments, continuing all the while with similar execrations. Finally, he hands him over to the secular authority. Something like this happens, Sisters, to persons who, by their inconstancy, lose their vocation. Little by little God withdraws His graces and ends by abandoning them entirely. Let us fear this just punishment and do all in our power to preserve this precious treasure.

AOne means of preserving your vocation is to have a high regard for it and to reflect often on the grace God has given you in taking you from your native place, your home, and your friends to place you in such a holy state of life. I had intended to have your Regulations and the holy

practices of the house read aloud, but I'm pressed for time; however, I won't fail to do so.

APlease tell me if the Daughters of Charity should rise at five o=clock and make their prayer afterward.@ The Sisters= replies showed that none of them failed to do so, except that, for meditation, those who didn't know how to read and those who, because of the large number of patients couldn't make their prayer at home, did so during Holy Mass.

One of the Sisters asked if it was better to make one's prayer or to go to Holy Mass. AThat's a good question, Sisters,@ said M. Vincent. AAs far as possible, you should hear Mass every day, but if you are needed in the house or have to attend to poor persons, you should have no qualms about omitting it. I'll tell you what an Abbot of the Order of Saint Bernard said to me on this topic. In his day, there were only three or four priests and a number of other religious in the house, who went off to work immediately after making their meditation. A nobleman who had observed this said to the Abbot one day, >Father, how is it that your religious don't go to daily Mass?= >If they did, Monsieur, it would be very detrimental to the needs of the household.= >Tell me, please, how much you=d lose each year?= They calculated the amount of money that would be lost if they each assisted at Mass and found that it came to forty écus, which was a large sum of money at the time. The nobleman gave them that sum of money and, with it, the convenience of hearing Mass.

AFrom this example, Sisters, you see that, in those cases of necessity to which I=ve referred, you shouldn't worry if you can't get to Mass every day. As to knowing which you should prefer, meditation or Mass, when you have a free half-hour, I tell you that you shouldn't omit either. Go to church and, after making the preparation with the priest, say the *Confiteor,* so that, your sins being forgiven, your prayers will be more pleasing to God. Then begin to make your meditation on the subject, which you'll read in the book, as you read it the previous evening. But as far as possible, Sisters, get in the habit of making your mental prayer at home, as your Rule and the custom of the house prescribe.

AAfter Mass, you should work at learning how to read in order to be able to teach little girls. Apply yourselves seriously to this, dear Sisters, because it's one of the two aims for which you give yourselves to God: the service of the sick poor and the education of youth, especially in country places. The city is almost fully furnished with Sisters, so it's only right that you should go to minister in the country. Aren't all of you disposed to do so, dear Sisters, with no further thought of where you may be sent, of your friends, or whether to places that are near or far?@ With cheerful countenances, all the Sisters replied that they intended to go wherever obedience might send them.

AAs for your examination of conscience before dinner, be faithful to that, Sisters. You know it's to be made on the resolution taken at morning meditation, and to thank God if, by His grace, you=ve put it into practice, or to ask His forgiveness if, through negligence, you=ve failed to do so.@ Most of the Sisters promised not to omit the examination of conscience.

AAnd, dear Sisters, do you think of God frequently?@ Some Sisters said they raised their hearts to God several times an hour; others, whenever there were slight annoyances. Most said they did so every hour; a few said almost never.

ASisters, the custom of reading a chapter of our blessed Father's *Introduction*[1] has been very helpful to you. Don't neglect this means. As for reconciliation, when there's any little disagreement between you, do you kneel before one another to ask each other's forgiveness? That's a very necessary practice, as also that of charitably admonishing one another when you see your Sister commit a fault. But do you know how to do this? If a Sister notices that one of

her companions has committed a fault in private, she should remind her of it once or twice in order to practice fraternal correction. If the warning proves useless, she should tell either the Directress or me, whichever is more convenient. You see, Sisters, this is a divine command, since God himself said He will demand an account of our brother's soul from each of us. We=re responsible for one another. As for me, M. Dehorgny[2] has the duty of reminding me of the faults I commit. You should do the same for one another. I recommend this practice; it's a great blessing for those who comply with it.@ By asking questions, M. Vincent saw that it was practiced only by some Sisters, and very rarely by others.

ALet's be faithful to God, Sisters, and fear His judgments, especially since we'll have to give Him an account of how we lived our vocation. I myself have great reason to fear them.

AI'm pressed for time; we'll have to stop here and take up this point again two weeks from now. Please come without any further notification. May God be pleased to be glorified by what we=ve said, Sisters, and to grant us the grace of imitating the charity of the great Saint Roch so that, fearing nothing, we may practice charity purely for the love of God! I ask Him with all my heart to bless you. In the name of the Father, etc.@

7. - THE JUBILEE[1]

October 15, 1641

ADear Sisters, this meeting has no other purpose than to instruct you on the Jubilee so that, knowing what it is, you may have an even greater desire to gain it. I'll explain the Jubilee, why we have it, and the means of gaining it.

AThe word >Jubilee= comes to us from the Old Law. A Jubilee year used to occur only once every hundred years and brought great privileges to those who were living at the time; but it was only for temporal benefits: those who had sold property could recover it and those who had any debts were released from them. The year was called the year of joy or jubilation; from that comes the word >Jubilee.=

ANow, under the law of grace, dear Sisters, the joy of the Jubilee is quite different for Christians. Holy Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, grants a Jubilee regularly every twenty-five years; consequently, we'll have one nine years from now. In virtue of the power given by Jesus Christ to Saint Peter, the Holy Father may grant an exceptional Jubilee because of certain great needs, as we see this year--not in the same way as under the Old Law, but rather by giving us the means to recover God's grace, which we=ve lost by sin, to recoup our strength, and to compensate for the good we should have done but didn=t. The reason the Jubilee has been established, dear Sisters, is the universal need that is obvious throughout Christendom. Furthermore, the Holy Father has extended it not only to France, Italy, Spain, and the Indies, but also to the Antipodes, to implore God to pardon our sins.

AAnd do you know what the grace of the Jubilee is? The Holy Father, who holds the key of the treasures of the Church and the power to dispense them to the faithful, does so liberally. Do you know what makes up these treasures? First, the merits of the life, death, and Passion of Jesus Christ, those of the Blessed Virgin, of the holy martyrs, and of all the saints, the value of which is derived from the merits of the Son of God.

Are you aware, dear Sisters, of the advantage our souls will derive from the Jubilee, if we make it well? When people offend God, they turn away from Him and turn toward creatures; that is, they turn their backs on God and their faces toward creatures. Isn't acting in this way, dear Sisters, a great affront to God, who is so good and so worthy of being loved? Now, Sisters, you should know that the sinner's turning away from God merits hell for him, and his turning toward

creatures earns him punishment, sickness, and other afflictions, as you often see happen to persons on earth, or as happens in purgatory, when they haven't made satisfaction in this life. However, dear Sisters, we mustn't conclude that everyone who is afflicted in this life is afflicted because of the punishment due to their sins. God sometimes acts that way for other reasons--to test their love and fidelity, for instance, as in the case of Job and Tobias, both of whom were His friends. But, when there's generalized affliction of all peoples, there's reason to believe that God wills to punish us for our sins. That's why, dear Sisters, we should all strive to gain this Jubilee.

AI told you that sin has two effects: a turning away from God and a turning toward creatures. By our ordinary confessions we efface sin, which causes us to deserve hell. By trials, sickness, and afflictions, the turning toward creatures is remedied and, by gaining the Jubilee, the punishments our sins deserve are entirely remitted. So you see how it profits us to gain this holy Jubilee, Sisters.

ALet's reflect carefully on what we have done when we have offended God. *Quoi!* Sisters, if a courtier, in the apartment of his Prince, were to turn his back on him, wouldn't he do him a great dishonor? How much greater if this were done in order to turn toward another creature! To take pleasure in offending God and in seeking our own satisfactions instead of pleasing Him! How despicable we are when we behave like that, Sisters! During this holy period, let's strive to satisfy the justice of God. Perhaps this may be the last Jubilee we'll see during our lifetime. Let's not lose the opportunity of participating in this year of joy--not the joy of repossessing our temporal goods, but of avoiding the punishments we=d infallibly have to suffer if we hadn't made satisfaction for our sins. That's the order that was given us by God from the beginning of the world when, in pardoning Adam, He imposed on him the punishment due to his sin, and when He told David that the son of the mother who had sinned with him would die to satisfy the punishment due to his sensuality.

ALet's now see, dear Sisters, the means of gaining the Jubilee. They=re the ones laid down in the Holy Father's Bull. The first is to return to God with all your heart by a good, complete confession. Yes, Sisters, this penance has such great power that God has said, >If I told the sinner that he would be damned, and he does penance, I will not damn him.=[2] So, dispose yourselves to make a good confession, Sisters, and if all of you haven't made general confessions, then think about doing so. What a benefit that will be for you, Sisters; for not only will your sins be forgiven, but amends will be made for your acts of negligence! Examine yourselves carefully, particularly on the Commandments of God and the observance of your Regulations--which is no slight matter, since your vocation is one of the greatest and holiest in the Church. How necessary it is for you to be very virtuous if you=re to persevere, Sisters! You=re called not only to care for the bodies of the sick poor, but also to instruct them in whatever way you can. That's why it's important that you lose no opportunity of being well instructed yourselves. And since one of the principal components of Penance is a firm purpose of amendment, you must be very careful to make it before going to confession.

AAnother condition laid down by the Bull for gaining the Jubilee is to fast once or three times during the week chosen to gain it. Persons who have never made a general confession and who might have serious--even reserved--sins, should fast on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday; and everyone else on Friday only. All confessors approved by the Archbishop of Paris,[3] Sisters, have the same power of absolution as the Pope himself, but only for the period of the Jubilee.

AAnother condition is to visit certain churches. Many have been designated, but it suffices to visit one or several of them. We have to pray in them for the intentions of the Church, which are

the ones for which the Holy Father has opened its treasures to us, namely, for the sanctification and exaltation of Holy Church, peace among Christian Princes, and, in general, the conversion of sinners.

AYou should also have the intention, Sisters, of becoming truly good Daughters of Charity, for it's not enough to be Daughters of Charity in name; you must be so genuinely. It was of little avail for the five virgins mentioned in the Gospel to be virgins and to be called to the wedding of the spouse, since they didn't go in to it. They had no oil for their lamps, that is, they didn't have charity, and hadn't been exact in the observance of their Rules. So, dear Sisters, it's not our state in life, it's not our qualifications that make us pleasing to God and save us, but it's how we use the qualifications we have. Our Lord himself has said so, To all those who will say, >Lord, have we not driven out devils in your name and done many other good deeds?= He will reply, >I do not know you.=[4] And why is that? Because they haven't performed those deeds in charity. That, Sisters, is why you must be very exact in the observance of your Rules. In that way you'll become more perfect, and will make yourself pleasing to your Spouse, who will accept the services you render Him in the person of His sick poor. Look, Sisters, examine yourselves: are you better now than when you came to the Charity? A great saint has said that a person who doesn't advance in the spiritual life, falls back. Haven't you lost a great deal if, for the last four, seven, or eight years, you haven't advanced in the spiritual life, the correction of your faults, and the mortification of your senses?@

One of the Sisters protested that she had a very hard time making her meditation and had no attraction to it. AI'm really glad that you=ve raised this objection, Sister. It's true that those who can make use of the methods given to make mental prayer--especially the one given in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*--do very well, but everyone can't do this; however, each individual can stand at the foot of the Cross, in the presence of God and, if she has nothing to say to Him, she'll wait for Him to speak to her. If He leaves her there, she'll remain willingly, awaiting from His goodness the grace either of listening to Him or of speaking to Him. For twenty years Saint Teresa[5] persevered in waiting for God to grant her the gift of prayer, and she received it so fully that her writings are admired by the greatest Doctors. So don't be discouraged, dear Sisters, if you think you=re wasting your time at meditation; it's enough for you to do God's Will by obeying your Regulations. Aren't all of you willing to do this, dear Sisters?@

The Sisters showed that this was their intention. And because the care of the sick often prevents Sisters in the parishes from making their mental prayer, M. Vincent, with his usual charity, proposed changing the hours of rising and retiring. All the Sisters willingly accepted this, even though they said it would be difficult for them. Then M. Vincent encouraged us once again not to omit anything in order to gain the Jubilee. ASo now, Sisters, think about preparing yourselves for this holy time. If you like, I'll help you in this; yes, Sisters, I'll give you a day or two during the week to hear your confessions.@

His charity was obvious in his usual magnanimity. He made no further reference to the Sisters= failings, but rather simply encouraged them to do better, and he listened very patiently to many proposals that seemed useless. A few Sisters made excuses for not observing the Regulations, some, because they were in the habit of visiting the Ladies to obtain alms for needy poor

persons and, in return, to do little services for them in order to please them; others, because at times they stayed up very late to do spinning in order to have enough to live on and support

themselves.

AI'm so glad you=ve raised those objections, Sisters,@ replied M. Vincent. AYou see, those visits that keep you from observing your Regulations must be curtailed. The first time the Ladies send for you, go to them in God's name and say, >Madame, in order to come to you, I=ve missed my mental prayer or some other spiritual exercise; I very humbly ask you not to take it amiss if I don't come on another occasion.= You can be sure, Sisters, that the Ladies won't take it badly at all, but on the contrary will love you all the more. As for your work, Sisters, you have enough to live on. One of your Sisters has no more than you; yet, about a year ago, she sent me fifty francs from what she had saved. I'm not advising you to be idle, but your primary concern has to be the service of poor persons and the practice of your Regulations.

AWell now, my very dear Sisters, I ask God, who has inspired our Holy Father with the thought of opening for us the treasures of God's mercy, to be pleased to dispose your souls to receive them. May His love, which has called you to such a holy practice, grant you the grace to gain this holy Jubilee and give you renewed strength in observing your Regulations! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.@

8. - FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF THE PAST YEAR

January 6, 1642

AMy very dear Sisters, we=re meeting today, at the start of this new year, to see how you=ve spent the past year and how you can try to spend this year better. You should attach great importance to the name you bear. It was not human persons who gave it to you; and that's very clear evidence that it comes to you from God himself. At the beginning of Christianity, the Fathers of the Church held it for certain that those writings whose authors couldn't be discovered after careful research were composed by the Apostles. That's a great source of consolation for you, Sisters, for no one ever thought of giving you a name. But, in the course of time, when people saw you totally devoted to the service of poor persons and other good works, they called you familiarly >Daughters of Charity.= Have great respect for this Holy Name, Sisters, and act in such a way as always to show that you=re worthy of bearing it. What do you think is the meaning of this beautiful title of >Daughters of Charity,= Sisters? Nothing else than >Daughters of God,= since whoever is in charity is in God and God is in him.[1] So then, you must be very kind and gracious and a school of every virtue.

AIn the first place, there must be close union among yourselves and, if it were possible, it should be like the union of the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity; for how, dear Sisters, could you practice charity and gentleness with persons who are poor, if you didn't practice those virtues among yourselves?

ASo, we'll begin with a sort of stocktaking of the shortcomings of the past year. I'm going to mention seven that I myself noticed or of which I=ve been informed. This will be a good means for your self-improvement. I'm sorry, Sisters, that I couldn't hold this conference sooner; it should be held at the end of every year. That's the custom in many Communities, including our own. Didn't a great prophet say that he reflected in the bitterness of his soul on his sins of the past?[2]

AThe first fault is a lack of tolerance toward one another. Nothing is more necessary than this mutual support, dear Sisters, because minor personality clashes are normal. Don't you see that we ourselves have mood changes so often that we become unbearable to ourselves? That's what led Job to cry out, >My God, how is it that you=ve made me feel so burdensome to myself?=[3]

And don't you see that even our inner organs, apparently so united, are sometimes not in harmony? That's why we have to be strongly committed to the practice of mutual support, Sisters.

AIf the senior Sisters bear with the shortcomings of the young, see in them God's call to His service, and encourage them by word and example, they will honor the perfect age of Our Lord and His forbearance with the very imperfect men around Him. The Son of God taught His followers much more by example than by word. Imitate Him, dear Sisters. The senior Sisters must be very exact to all the customs; do what they tell others to do; choose the worst, put up with the minor failings of newcomers, encourage them by their words, and console them at times in their little troubles, telling them that they themselves experienced similar ones--because all of you have had them, Sisters, and it's good to have them, provided they are disclosed honestly to Superiors, and to them alone. The senior Sisters have to encourage the newcomers, show them respect, praise their little efforts, accept what they say and do and, above all, take care not to talk to them and treat them like strangers or make fun of the way they speak and the cut of their clothes. When they meet them, they should always say a good word to them, as, for instance, >Well, Sister, are you very fervent? Do you really love meditation and all the practices of our little Regulations? Keep at it! How are you getting on? Are you beginning to get used to our way of living?= @

It was pointed out to M. Vincent that several Sisters were scandalized by the departure of Sisters who were leaving the Company, especially of those who had been in it for eight to ten years; they were murmuring and becoming discouraged. Others find it hard that people often ask them what they=re earning, tell them they=re wasting their time, or treat them like idlers, and claim that they=re staying to lead an easy life.

ASisters,@ M. Vincent replied, Ano one should be surprised regarding Sisters who have left. You=re well aware of how patient we=ve been with them; sometimes they were changed to another house, sometimes their companions were changed because we thought they might get on better with certain Sisters than with others; we even sent them to the country to try, by every means, to help them to persevere in their vocation. If, after all that, they haven't been able to master themselves, would you want us to keep them at the risk of harming the whole Community? That would be unreasonable, dear Sisters. You can be sure that nothing is done without weighing it carefully. A short time ago I had some complaints from a person of quality, in whose house one of those women was working. >Monsieur,= he said to me, >if my wife doesn't send that woman away soon, I think I'll have to leave home because she's such a dangerous person.=

AOne day I was giving the Archbishop of Paris a report of the visitation of a monastery, which I had made on his orders. I told him I found nothing amiss in that house, except that most of the nuns complained that the Mother Superior accepted everyone who presented themselves, and none of them ever left. >Oh!= he replied, >What poor government! What greed!= This shows how important it is that nuns rid themselves of persons who might do harm to the others. That's why, dear Sisters, you should never be surprised when some leave because, you see, you=re putting yourselves in danger of criticizing your Superiors, which would be a great fault--worse than that committed by a murderer. You see, if the body of a man who had been killed was in your house, the murderer would have done less harm that the faultfinder; for he killed only a body, but the person who finds fault puts herself in danger of killing many souls. Be very careful about that, dear Sisters, because when you grumble among yourselves, or speak ill of the poor

Sister who has left, or criticize the conduct of your Superiors, these are faults that God will surely punish.

AOne day Noah, who wasn't thinking clearly because he had drunk a little too much wine, lay completely naked. Some of his children made fun of him, but one of them, knowing the respect due to his father, turned his back so as not to see him, and covered him with his cloak. Do you know what happened? The sons who had criticized their father were cursed by God, as were all their descendants as well; but the respectful son was blessed, along with all his posterity.[4]

AWhen people ask you what you=re earning and claim that you=re wasting your time, dear Sisters, fortify yourselves against all such attacks and reply that you consider yourself quite fortunate that God should want to make use of you in this state of life. Don't be afraid; if they see you so determined, they'll say no more to you about it. And to those who call you servants and criticize you for earning your living easily, just say, >We=d be willing to serve God and poor persons at our own expense, and if I had the means, I=d gladly do so; to show the love and honor we owe to poor persons, I=d very willingly make myself poor to serve them.= Say this, dear Sisters, but on condition that you feel it in your hearts.

APeople may also object to you that the Company may do well during your lifetime, but after you the whole thing will collapse. In reply to that, dear Sisters, I can tell you that this never happens to the works of God. You=d have poor support if you had only that of a weak creature. Your strength is Divine Providence, which initiated your Company; for who has chosen you, I ask you; who has made you what you are if not God? I can't repeat this to you often enough. We, for our part, never planned it. On what foundation do you think Our Lord established His Church? There were many who followed Him, but at the end of His days only twelve remained, all of whom were put to death. How little do God's works resemble those of human beings! Wasn't the same said of the Oratorian Fathers at the time Fr. de Bérulle[5] died, and of Saint Francis? But what am I saying, despicable sinner that I am? There's no comparison. No, Sisters, fear not, God will never fail you, if you=re faithful to Him. Work hard, then, to perfect yourselves by serving persons who are poor.

AWe'll meet again in a month's time and discuss what should be done at the beginning of this new year. I beg the Divine Goodness to bless you by giving you the gentle graciousness of true Daughters of Charity, mutual support in your weaknesses, and the grace of reconciliation with one another should any little difficulties arise among you. Lastly, Sisters, I beg the Divine Goodness to bless you by filling you with absolute confidence in His Divine Providence to accomplish eternally the most holy Will of God and to bless you forever by the gift of all the qualities of true Daughters of Charity, according to His plan. In the name of the Father, etc.@

9. - CARE OF THE SICK

March 9 [1642][1]

On March 9, because of urgent business, M. Vincent was unable to be present at the beginning of the conference His Charity had intended to give us on the manner of serving the sick poor, namely, how to help them to make good use of their illnesses in accordance with God's plan for them, to prepare them for death if their illness is terminal, and, if not, to exhort them to take the firm resolution to spend the rest of their days in the service of God better than they had ever done, and to reflect more seriously on their salvation. M. Portail began the conference and questioned several Sisters, whose thoughts will be given in the report of the previous conference on this subject, God willing. I'll simply state here that, when one Sister said

she felt it necessary to prepare the sick to make a general confession, M. Portail added that this was very important indeed and that God was blessing this practice, since He had made use of it to inspire the wife[2] of the General of the Galleys to establish the Priests of the Mission. The following is an account of how that happened:

In one of her visits to a man eighty years old, the said lady advised him to make a general confession. After this confession, which was heard by M. Vincent, when the old man was again visited by the General's wife, he said to her several times, AMadame, without that confession I would have been lost; yes, Madame, I was damned; I had sins I had never dared to confess, and I never would have confessed them were it not for that confession.@ From that moment the lady decided to found the Mission.

M. Vincent arrived around five o=clock, and after listening to what some of our Sisters had said, His Charity continued, ASisters, it's getting very late; I can't tell you how consoled I=ve been by the little I=ve heard, and I think I would have been even more consoled had I heard all those who spoke and those who haven't yet been questioned, but we have to postpone the discussion until next Sunday, God willing, because this is a matter of great importance, Sisters; it's the reason God has called you. Meditate again on the same points, and add another which I forgot to mention--or to which we didn't give much attention--namely, the motives or reasons we have for serving the poor well, not only corporally but spiritually. We wouldn=t, in fact, be doing enough for God and the neighbor if we only gave the sick poor food and medicine and if we didn't assist them, in accord with God's plan, by the spiritual service we owe them. When you serve poor persons in this way, you'll be true Daughters of Charity, that is to say, daughters of God, and you'll be imitating Jesus Christ. For how did He serve persons who were poor, Sisters? He served them corporally and spiritually; He went from place to place, healing the sick, giving them what money He had, and instructing them about their salvation. What a happiness, Sisters, that God has chosen you to continue the ministry of His Son on earth! Make your meditation Sunday morning on this topic and reflect before God on the motives or reasons why we should serve poor persons corporally and spiritually, one of the chief motives being to honor the holy humanity of Our Lord by imitating His actions in this respect. What a happiness, Sisters, to do what a God did when He was on earth!@

This very dear Father wanted to add another motive, but refrained, saying, AOh no, Sisters! You should be left free for the rest, and I'll be content to do as mothers do who, when they=re obliged to wean their babies before they can eat properly, chew up a little bread for them at first--not much, otherwise they would extract all the substance from it. So I have to do the same, and in God's presence you'll see and learn the other reasons from Him.

AWell now, Sisters, I implore God, the Source of charity, to grant you the grace to learn how to serve the sick poor corporally and spiritually in His Spirit, in perfect imitation of the Spirit of His Son, and also to bless you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

10. - CARE OF THE SICK

[March 16, 1642][1]

This is a continuation of the conference on the motives we have to serve the sick poor corporally and spiritually and to teach them how to make good use of their illnesses, to prepare them for death, and to take firm resolutions to lead a better life if they=re cured. This conference was held on the [second] Sunday of Lent, and M. Vincent did us the honor of being present from the beginning. After announcing the topic, His Charity asked the Sisters to share their thoughts.

First, the motives: AThe first motive,@ said a Sister, Ais that poor persons have the honor of representing the members of Jesus Christ, who considers the services rendered to them as done to himself. The second is that the souls of poor persons have the image of God imprinted upon them, and therefore we=re bound to honor the Blessed Trinity in them. The third is that the Son of God has recommended this service to us by word and example. To show the disciples of Saint John that He was the Messiah, He told them that the poor had the Gospel preached to them and the sick were healed. The fourth is that to assist a soul to save itself is to cooperate in the perfect fulfillment of God's plan in the death of Jesus Christ.@

AOne powerful motive,@ another Sister said, Ais that, by serving poor persons, we honor what the Son of God did while on earth in His holy humanity.@ (Several Sisters thought of this motive.) AAnother is our obligation to help our neighbor as we would wish to be aided if we were in need of assistance. Since God has not permitted us to have any wealth so as to give great alms, we must at least devote to the service of the poor what little strength and ability He gives us.@

Another Sister remarked that those who are poor are abandoned by everyone, have many needs, lack consolation in their sufferings, don't always know who God is, and sometimes have not even thought about their salvation. This Sister, as well as most of the others, was deeply humbled at the thought of the grace God had given her in calling her to such a holy vocation; she resolved to have greater respect for it and to be more faithful to God in it.

Another Sister's motives: She's happy to belong to a Company bearing the name of Daughters of Charity and feels she should honor the poor in it, look upon the little foundlings as such, and care for them as if she were caring for the Son of God himself, as long as she's employed in this apostolate, as He himself asks. Since the principal aim of the Daughters of Charity is to imitate the life of Jesus Christ on earth, she wants to devote her own life to the service of poor persons because the Son of God died on the Cross for them as well as for us. In this way we will be true Daughters of Charity in deed and not simply in name. The last motive is to render the poor all possible service for love of God and because of her desire to see Him one day in His glory.

Several Sisters gave as a motive gratitude for the great grace God has granted them in calling them to a vocation like that of the Son of God on earth; they humbled themselves for their negligence in it until now, and formed new resolutions of greater fidelity to God.

The thought that poor persons are the members of Our Lord was for all the Sisters a strong motive for serving them with greater care and charity than ever before.

Another Sister said that, since she possesses nothing and that almsgiving is, nevertheless, very pleasing to God, she wants to give herself completely to the poor to honor the life of the Son of God, who died for them.

Another Sister stated that, since she has been called by God to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, she must serve poor persons spiritually, that is, to assist them to know God and take the means of saving themselves; and corporally, that is, to administer food and remedies to them with great care and kindness.

ASince God wants us to serve Him in the person of the poor,@ remarked another Sister, AI will look upon them in Jesus Christ and serve them for love of Him.@

Another Sister said that we should consider God in the person of those who are poor and, with the intention of imitating Him, call to mind the gentleness, humility, and charity Jesus Christ practiced on earth in serving them, making no exception of persons and treating all

equally according to their need.

Another Sister noted that God is very pleased with the service rendered to poor persons for love of Him. She acknowledges that she's unworthy of her vocation and believes that everyone else would do better than she would. Nevertheless, she submits to the order of Divine Providence, which has called her to the Company, and promises to visit the poor with the thought that she's honoring the holy life of Jesus Christ.

Here follow the means of encouraging the sick poor to make good use of the illness sent them by God, as reported by the Daughters of Charity in the aforesaid conference:

After greeting the sick in a moderately cheerful manner, finding out the state of their illness, sympathizing with them in their sufferings, and telling them that God is sending you to serve and comfort them to the best of your ability, enquire into the state of their souls. Explain to them that they should accept their sickness from the hand of God for their own greater good and that in His eternal love He permits that illness in order to bring them back to Him because often, when we=re well, we think only of working for the life of the body and don't trouble ourselves at all about our salvation. After that, suggest that they make an act of faith in all the articles of our religion in general and an act of conformity to God's Will, especially in what concerns the acceptance of sickness. Teach them that God sometimes afflicts us because of our sins and at other times to give us the opportunity of showing Him our love. Speak to them kindly, saying, for example, AMy dear brother or sister, in your great sufferings think of those of the Son of God, ask Him to unite yours to His and to offer them to His Father for your sins.@

Say to them sometimes, AMy dear patient, reflect that, since Jesus Christ has suffered so much for you, you should suffer patiently for love of Him, and that it's not reasonable for the servant to take a different path than that of his master. Consider also that God has allowed your body to be ill in order to cure your soul, which should be very important to you, since it was created for paradise, where you'll be with God forever. To help you to be patient, often ask God for it, and have the Holy Name of Jesus often on your lips.

AI'm well aware, my good friend, that your poverty will increase your troubles because of the inconvenience to your wife and children; but, to soften these thoughts, think of the poverty of the Son of God, and of His Holy Mother who didn't even have a place to stay when He came into the world. He himself said that He had nowhere to lay His sacred head. O my brother, what a great consolation!@

AOne thing that should console you in your illness, brother, is that, even though it may be very serious, it's nothing in comparison with what Our Lord suffered for you on the Cross. If you endure it patiently and for love of God, He'll increase the glory you'll have in heaven. This sickness will pass, but the consolation of having suffered for love of God and for having submitted to the Will of God will remain, and He will love you more!

AYou see, brother, this illness God has sent you will perhaps help you to avoid the pains of hell, which will last for all eternity. Rest assured that it will greatly diminish those you might have to endure in purgatory for your sins--but on one condition, namely, that you make good use of it and bear it for love of God. On the contrary, if you grow impatient during your illness, you'll lose a great deal. I don't mean if you moan, for moaning isn't impatience.@

One Sister commented that, on entering the patients= rooms, it was a good thing to see in them Our Lord on the Cross and to tell them that their bed should represent for them Our Lord's Cross, on which they are suffering with Him.

Reflections of another Sister: AIf the sick person shows a little annoyance, tell him that when

we=re ill it's by God's permission and that, in this state, we should ask ourselves what we=d wish, at the moment of death, to have done during our lifetime. During this illness we should also try to make amends for all our sins by conformity to God's Will, patient endurance of the poverty and pains we experience, and the union of our sufferings with those of Jesus on the Cross.@

Another Sister said, AEncourage the sick person to make good use of his illness by pointing out to him that his sickness is permitted by God his Creator, whom he must adore and love, and to whom he must submit. This Sister expressed deep gratitude to God because, by His grace, He had chosen her to make Him known and loved, and thus to imitate what His Son did on earth.@

Most of the Sisters said that, as soon as they begin to nurse the sick poor, they must help them to profit from their condition and, for this purpose, point out to them that if we=re in mortal sin, nothing we do or endure will be pleasing to God, we will lose many merits, and all our sufferings and pains become useless. Next, they should find out the time of their last confession and Communion and explain how the grace of God is the life of the soul, just as food is the life of the body, and, if we were to remain long without eating, our bodies would cease to be alive.

11. - OBEDIENCE

June [20] 1642[1]

AMy very dear Sisters, our conference today will be on one of the topics that's most important for your perfection, namely, most holy obedience, a virtue so pleasing to God that the Holy Spirit has said through the Fathers of the Church that obedience is better than sacrifice, and that it was God's Will that His Son practice it for thirty years on earth, until His death. Yes, Jesus Christ preferred holy obedience to life itself. Didn't He say to Saint Peter, who tried to prevent the Jews from arresting Him, >Do you not want me to do the Will of God my Father, which is to obey the soldiers, Pilate, and the executioners? And were it not for the accomplishment of this most holy Will, would not legions of angels come to deliver me?=[2] O holy virtue! You'll be pleasing to God, Sisters, only to the extent that you=re obedient.

ABut do you know how this virtue should be practiced? In many different ways because we owe obedience to the Holy Father, Bishops, Pastors, our confessors, Directors, and Superiors, as well as to the King and Magistrates. And all those who hold the position of Superiors are also obliged to be obedient. I myself, worthless as I am, am bound to obey, so much so that, if those who can command me were to send me to the ends of the earth, I would be obliged to go. What is more, by God's mercy, I=d prefer to die rather than fail in this. We are also bound to obey our Rules and Divine Providence, and you, the Ladies who are officers of the Charity.

ASisters, if you only knew how necessary obedience is for the Daughters of Charity! Yes, I tell you, it's more necessary for you than for any other Community. What can keep you in the service of God and your holy vocation if not obedience? Do you know what obedience is for you? It serves you as a ship does for those at sea. The ship encloses everyone on it and takes them to port. If it is shipwrecked and breaks up in the open sea, they all die. The same is true for you, dear Sisters. As long as you remain in exact obedience to your Superiors, your Rule, and Divine Providence, you'll go straight to God; but if you stray from it, you'll certainly be shipwrecked. You don't have occasion to obey the Holy Father, the Bishops, or Magistrates, but you have plenty of opportunities to obey your Superiors. Let's now see the way to obey, and what true obedience is.

AYou must obey willingly, punctually, cheerfully, promptly, with discernment, and, above

all, for the good pleasure of God. You owe entire obedience to your Director. And since God has entrusted me in some way with your guidance, unworthy as I am, you=re obliged to obey my orders. To those of you whom I know (and there are many), I=ve recommended that they be satisfied in ordinary confessions with accusing themselves of three sins because, by God's mercy, I daresay that none of those whose confessions I=ve heard is guilty of mortal sin; in which case, confessing the three venial sins that cause you the greatest shame suffices. You'll find it easier to recall them, and it will also be easier for you to make an act of contrition or attrition for each of them and to take the resolution to amend. If you accused yourself of a great number of sins, how could you manage to detest and renounce them all? You couldn't do it, Sisters! So, practice obedience on this point, and this act will earn you God's mercy to make amends for the sins which, out of obedience, you don't confess.

ASome time ago I was deeply consoled on this point. One of the greatest servants of God I know[3] said to me about our Sisters in Angers, >Monsieur, I don't know any persons who make their confessions better than your good Sisters at the hospital. They confess without delay and seemingly from a truly penitent heart. They accuse themselves so contritely and promptly that it's obvious that they=re seeking nothing but the grace of God.= He gave them the same practice as has been given to you, Sisters. Please be obedient on this point.

AYou=re bound to obey your confessors in what concerns confession, such as doing the penances and using the means to keep you from offending God, but not in anything that might be wrong. They should be careful not to order you to do anything of that sort or advise you to do anything contrary to your Rules because in that case you wouldn't be obliged to obey them.

AYou=re also obliged to obey your Sister Superiors. That reminds me, Sisters, to tell you that recently I happened to be in a monastery of nuns--of the Annonciades,[4] I think it was. I noticed that their Mother Superior was called *Ancelle*, and that made me think of you. The word *ancelle*, dear Sisters, comes from the word *ancilla* which means >servant,= and that's what the Blessed Virgin called herself when she gave her consent to the angel that God's Will be fulfilled in the mystery of His Son's Incarnation. This has led me to think, dear Sisters, that, in future, instead of calling the Sister in charge by the title of >Superior,= we should use the expression >Sister Servant.=

AWhat do you think?@ said our very dear Father to some of the Sisters. And his proposal was accepted. AThat's the title the Holy Father gives himself,@ he added, Aand all his communications begin, >Urban, Servant of the servants of Jesus Christ.= When the Sister Superiors of the Company of the Hôtel-Dieu were first established there, they also took that title. That was the wish of dear Mme Goussault, the President's wife.[5]

ASo then, my very dear Sisters, you owe obedience to whichever one of you will have this duty, in all that concerns the service of the poor and the practice of your Rules. You also owe obedience to the guidance of Divine Providence, accepting and receiving from the hand of God whatever you=re ordered to do. But let's see, Sisters, what reasons we have for obeying. The first is that obedience is so pleasing to God that He told us by the holy Fathers of the Church that obedience is better than sacrifice. Now, you know the grandeur of sacrifice, dear Sisters, because from the beginning of time God has had sacrifice offered to Him to appease the Divine Justice, justly incensed against man on account of his sins. Since God tells us by the voice of the Church that obedience is worth much more, you see what respect you must have for it.

AAnother reason is that the Son of God willed to subject himself to it and practiced it perfectly for thirty years; and the Blessed Virgin did so all her life with Saint Joseph. It's also

said of the Son of God that He was obedient even to death on the Cross. What more powerful motive would you want to love and practice holy obedience, Sisters?

AAnother motive for loving obedience is that, as a rule, we deceive ourselves and allow ourselves to be blinded by our passions, so we need guidance in order to do good. Believe me, dear Sisters, obedience must be your principal virtue. But how should you obey, Sisters? Promptly, cheerfully, with discernment, and, above all, to please God. When you obey, you should reflect, >I'm pleasing God,= or what comes to the same thing, >I give pleasure to God.= Sisters, isn't the thought that we=re pleasing God a means to help us to overcome the reluctance we might have in obeying?

AObedience must be prompt, Sisters, because to delay and to go about things lethargically greatly lessens the merit of this virtue, gives bad example to your peers, and saddens Superiors, and the result may be that the person who told you to do something would rather do it herself and, as a matter of fact, she sometimes does it. So then, dear Sisters, be very prompt in obeying. The example of the Blessed Virgin going to Bethlehem and fleeing into Egypt should serve you as an example. Your obedience must also be given willingly, and not through constraint or fear of causing displeasure or of being reprimanded. And if you experience a little reluctance in it, which may happen--yes, Sisters, that can happen--you must overcome such reluctance courageously; otherwise your obedience would be without merit.

AObedience must also be accompanied by submission of your judgment. What's the meaning of >submission of your judgment,= Sisters? It means doing what you=ve been instructed to do in the belief that it will be for the best, even though it may seem to you that what you=re being told to do isn't as good as what you think. And it will be better, because holy obedience is pleasing to God. Often, Sisters, our judgment is blind, and the knowledge of what is best is concealed from us, just as the rays of the sun are sometimes hidden by a passing cloud; yet the rays are there, even though they=re not seen for a time. So it may happen that the knowledge of what is best is concealed from us because we=re preoccupied by some passion--which shows us clearly that the safest path to follow is that of obedience.

AThe principal aim of your obedience, dear Sisters, should be to please God. What happiness for a poor, worthless creature to be able to please God! Isn't that a great happiness? Anything you do through obedience is very pleasing to God, since it's in compliance with His Will, which is the activity of the blessed. On the contrary, if you listen to your own will, even in the very best things of the world, then you run the risk of following the will of the devil who, transforming himself into an angel of light, urges us to do good in order to lead us to something evil. So then, dear Sisters, love to please God through your obedience.

AYour practices of obedience usually have to do with the Sister who is with you in the parish. Don't consider, dear Sisters, whether you like this Sister or not. Sometimes temptation and your own will may suggest that if it were some other Sister, you=d gladly obey her; >but this one= you'll say, >is so sullen and speaks to me so rudely that I find it very hard to obey her.= Be very careful, dear Sisters, not to allow your mind to dwell on such a thought. Reflect that Jesus Christ himself, or the Blessed Virgin, wants you to remember what I=ve said to you, namely, that by obeying your Sister you please God, and this submission and obedience that was so hard for you will assuredly become easy. The thought may also occur to you, >She's so moody that what she tells me to do one day, she no longer wants me to do another day.= Don't be surprised at that, Sisters. If Job complained to God that he often felt at war with himself, to such an extent that what he longed for in the morning was hateful to him in the evening, why shouldn't you,

whose temperaments are so different, have the same problem? But do you know what arranges everything? A little forbearance. Take care, dear Sisters, lest your reluctance when a Sister orders you to do something might prompt you to reply, >Do it yourself.= My dear Sisters, what an expression! >Do it yourself!= It's an expression from hell, an expression of disorder and disunion! It's an accursed expression! >Do it yourself!= Such an utterance should never come from the mouth of a Daughter of Charity.@ M. Vincent put so much stress on this expression that he made us see clearly how dangerous a meaning it had.

AThe obedience due to your Rules is also very important. You must obey them from the day you enter the Company because you were not admitted unless you stated that you were willing to do this. Usually, you=re given sufficient time to reflect on that; nothing about it is concealed from you. That's why you should be extremely punctual, dear Sisters, pay attention to all you=re told to do, and go at the appointed time to wherever the bell summons you for your spiritual exercises because to miss one exercise is to fail in all, just as to sin against one Commandment is to sin against all of them. And be careful, for if today you neglect the practice of one point of your Rules, tomorrow you'll neglect two, then three, and in the end God will withdraw His grace, and that's why lukewarmness and weariness in one's vocation often follow. In the end, God disdains being concerned with us, and we certainly deserve that. God doesn't want us to satisfy others to the prejudice of the love we owe Him, just as earthly husbands don't want their wives to make eyes at anyone other than themselves. He teaches us this truth, saying that He's a jealous God. Yes, Sisters, He is a jealous God, and the Spouse of our souls. It's not good to irritate Him.@

A Sister asked if it was better to obey the Ladies who are officers of the Charity when they want something the Sister doesn't want. AIn that situation, Sisters, don't put yourselves in danger of annoying those good Ladies, because it's clear that you should do what the Sister at the Motherhouse tells you to do. Provide for all the needs of your patients and go where obedience calls you, without discussing it with them. As for coming to the meetings, never miss them, not even to go to hear a sermon; for, even though it may be a very good thing to listen to sermons, you should still prefer these gatherings, which are held simply to teach you what you=re obliged to do; and everything that's said at them is for all of you and for each one of you in particular--which can't be said of sermons. I'm not saying that you shouldn't listen to them when you can, but only that you must prefer to come here on meeting days.

ADo you know how you must practice obedience to Divine Providence? When you have to change from one house to another, dear Sisters, be very prompt in doing so, reflecting that Divine Providence orders this, and never say, >Such and such a Sister, such and such an event has been the cause of my leaving that place.= On the contrary, believe that it's Divine Providence looking after you.@

I'm not sure if it was at this conference and on this topic that M. Vincent said to us, ASisters, you should have such deep devotion to Divine Providence and such great love for and confidence in it that if Providence itself had not given you the beautiful name of Daughters of Charity--which you must never change--you should be called Daughters of Providence, for it is Providence that has brought you into being.

AYou must also practice obedience to Divine Providence in the difficulties you encounter and in the changes I mentioned to you, convinced that Providence is allowing those challenges for your own greater good. In this way you will love them and not be upset by any difficulties you may experience. If each of you examines her conscience to see how she has failed in the

practice of obedience, you'll discover many faults in yourselves. These are very important practices, Sisters, and you should apply yourselves more earnestly to them than you=ve done in the past. Before this conference I spoke to three Sisters, who told me they had failed badly in this matter and wanted to humble themselves for it in presence of the Community.@ M. Vincent called each of them in turn, and they asked pardon of God and of the Company for the faults they had committed, of which people were aware and were dismayed by them, and they promised with God's grace to correct themselves.

ASisters,@ continued, M. Vincent, Aother serious faults have been noted in the Company, and you=re not working hard enough to correct them. Most of you have acknowledged that your sins were the cause of the collapse of your ceiling[6]--and my sins along with yours, I who am the worst sinner of all--and all of you have acknowledged particularly that the greatest fault among you is a lack of unity. A body can't be perfect if it's not completely unified. Isn't it essential, Sisters, that in a human body the head should carry out its own function and the arms and legs theirs? If the arms wanted to walk and the other members of the body to perform a function other than their own, it would be an abnormal body without order or harmony. It's the same when two Sisters aren't closely united, Sisters. Don't you see that if the head is sick, the other members bear with it? That's how it should be with you; bear with one another's failings, reflecting that if today you=ve put up with one of your Sisters, either in her bodily infirmities or in her bad mood, tomorrow she or some other Sister will have to bear with you in like manner.

AAnother great fault is that, when you have some difficulty or other, instead of telling us or the Sister at the house about it, you go and complain to one of your Sisters who will perhaps be as dissatisfied as you are, or who is unable to console you.@ There were also some other faults, which I don't remember now.

AWell now, dear Sisters,@ M. Vincent went on to say, Adon't you admit that most of you have fallen into these faults?@ We then knelt down; some Sisters acknowledged their faults, and we promised to be more exact in future. M. Vincent then asked this grace of God for the Company adding, ASisters, M. Portail reminded me of something that I think will be very helpful and agreeable to you, namely, to hold a conference on your Sisters who have died since the Company began. That will be the first item for our next meeting two weeks from now, God willing. I ask you to prepare for it by making your meditation twice on it; first, tomorrow morning, while it's still fresh in your mind; and second, at your house, on the morning of the day of the meeting, of which you'll be notified.

AThe subject is this: First point, the advantage to be gained by the Company from a conference on the virtues of the said Sisters, both in their lives and in their deaths; second point, to call to mind and share the virtues they manifested and in which they excelled; third point, to strive to practice those virtues, in imitation of our Sisters, for the love of God.

ABlessed be God, dear Sisters! I beg the Divine Goodness to grant all of you the grace to love holy obedience and to practice it in imitation of His Son, with regard to your Superiors, your Rules, and Holy Providence, and to grant you for this purpose the blessing of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

12. - THE VIRTUES OF MARGUERITE NASEAU [1]

[July 1642][2]

This is the report of what was said at the conference M. Vincent had someone give in his presence to the Daughters of Charity on the first eight Sisters who had died. The first point is found in the original.

Second point: consideration of the virtues each of us has noted in our Sisters who have gone to God.

Sister Marguerite Naseau was the first Sister who came to serve the sick poor in the parish of Saint-Sauveur, where the Confraternity of Charity was established in the year 1630. Marguerite Naseau from Suresnes was the first Sister who had the happiness of showing others the way, both to teach young girls and to nurse the sick poor, although she had almost no other teacher or schoolmistress but God. She was just a poor, uneducated cowherd. Moved by a powerful inspiration from heaven, the idea came to her to teach young people so she bought a primer and, since she was unable to go to school for instruction, went and asked the Pastor or the Assistant to tell her the first four letters of the alphabet.

On another occasion, she asked about the next four, and so on for the rest. Afterward, while minding the cows, she would study her lesson. If she saw a passerby who looked like he knew how to read, she would ask, AMonsieur, how is this word pronounced?@ In this way, she gradually learned to read, then taught other girls in her village. Next, she decided to go from village to village to teach the young people, accompanied by two or three other young women she had instructed. One would go to one village, and the other to another. The amazing thing is that she undertook all this with no money or any other assistance except Divine Providence. She often fasted for entire days and stayed in places where only the walls were left standing. Sometimes she worked day and night teaching not only little girls but even the older ones, doing so with no motive of vanity or self-interest and no other intention than the glory of God, who provided for all her major needs, without her even thinking about them. She herself told Mlle Le Gras that one time, when she hadn't had any bread for several days but hadn't told anyone of her distress, she found, on her return from Mass, enough food to last her for quite a long time.

The harder she worked at teaching the children, the more the village folk ridiculed and calumniated her, but her zeal grew only more ardent. She was so detached that she gave away all she had, depriving herself even of necessities. She provided for the education of a few young men who had no means of their own, frequently supplied them with food, and encouraged them to serve God. Those young men are now good priests. Eventually, as soon as she heard that there was a Confraternity of Charity in Paris for the sick poor, off she went, driven by the desire to be involved in this ministry, and, although she really wanted to continue to teach young people, nevertheless she gave up that practice of charity to take up the other, which she felt was more perfect and necessary. And that was how God wanted it, so that she might be the first Daughter of Charity and Servant of the Sick Poor in the city of Paris. She attracted to this other girls, whom she had helped to detach themselves from all superficial things and to embrace a devout life.

She was very humble and submissive, and so little attached to anything that she willingly changed parishes three times in a short period, and everyone missed her greatly when she left. In the parishes, she was just as charitable as she had been in the country, giving away anything she might have, whenever the opportunity presented itself. She could never refuse anything, and would have been willing to take everyone home with her. It should be noted that at this time no Community had yet been formed, nor any Rule that might order her to do otherwise. She was very patient and never complained. Everyone loved her because there was nothing in her that was not lovable. Her charity was so great that she died from sharing her bed with a poor plague-stricken girl. Attacked by this illness herself, she said good-bye to the Sister who was with her, as if she had foreseen that she was going to die, and went off to Saint Louis [Hospital], her heart

filled with joy and conformity to God's Will.

13. - IMITATING THE VIRTUES OF VILLAGE GIRLS

January 25, 1643

All the Sisters knelt down, entreated M. Vincent to ask God to forgive them for the poor use they had made of the grace of their vocation and of all the instructions they had been so fortunate to receive from His Charity, and promised to behave better in future. This kind Father, in his goodness, immediately asked God's forgiveness, as well as the grace needed by all his daughters.

AI had planned, Sisters, to speak to you on the feast of Saint Genevieve[1] and, since this great saint was a poor woman from the country, it seemed most fitting that I should say something to you about her virtues and those of true village girls, since the Divine Goodness has been pleased to call women from the country, first and foremost, to be members of your Company. And although I was unable to speak to you on that day because of something that prevented me, I thought it advisable not to change my plan, seeing that it's very logical for this great saint now in heaven, who was honored by Kings and all kinds of people on earth, to show us how she made herself pleasing to God by practicing the virtues of true village girls, which she did so perfectly.

AFirst of all, Sisters, keep in mind that, when I speak to you about village girls I don't intend to speak of all of them, but only of those who have the virtues of true country women. Likewise, when I am speaking of women from the country, I don't mean to exclude all city women, for I know there are some living in the towns who have the virtues of those in the country, and we have reason to believe that there are some of these even in your Company, and it really consoles me to see it. Blessed be God for this, Sisters! Blessed be God! But it's also true that in villages there are some--and only too many--who have the spirit of city women, especially those who live near the towns. It would seem as if the city air is contaminated and that contact with the others spreads inclinations to evil.

AIt will be very easy for me to speak to you about the virtues of good village girls because I know them by experience and by nature, since I'm the son of a humble tiller of the soil, and lived in the country until I was fifteen. In addition, for many years now the Priests of the Mission have ministered among country folk, so no one knows them better than we do. There's nothing to equal persons who really have the spirit of villagers; nowhere do you find deeper faith, greater recourse to God in time of need, nor greater gratitude to Him in times of prosperity.

ASo I can tell you, dear Sisters, that the spirit of true village girls is extremely simple--no slyness, nor words of double meaning; they=re not opinionated nor obstinate because in their simplicity they believe quite simply what they=re told. Daughters of Charity should be like that, Sisters, and you'll know that you=re really so if you=re truly simple, not attached to your own ideas, but accepting of those of others; if you=re candid in your speech, and if your hearts aren't thinking one thing while your lips say another. I can well believe that of you, dear Sisters! Blessed be God! Blessed be God, Sisters!

ATrue country women are noted for their great humility; they don't boast of what they have, don't talk about their relatives, and don't think they=re clever, but act in a straightforward manner. And even though some have more than others, they don't put on airs but live just like everyone else. That's not true of city women, who often boast even of things they don't possess, and are always talking about their homes, their relatives, and their easy circumstances. Sisters, true Daughters of Charity are, and should be, far removed from such a spirit, and, by the grace of God, I think this is fairly obvious because, although there are women of every social class among you, everything is the same, and that's how it should be. Sisters from the upper class should

adopt the true spirit of good village girls and live as they do. I must tell you, dear Sisters, how consoled I am whenever I see those of you who really have this spirit--and there are some who do. May God be blessed for it! Yes, I repeat, Sisters, that when I meet you in the streets, with your basket on your back, I experience inexpressible joy. May God be blessed for it!

AThe humility of good country women keeps them from being ambitious. I say >good ones,= Sisters, for I'm well aware that not all of them are so virtuous, and that even in the country there are some who are just as ambitious as those in the towns; but I'm talking about the good ones who haven't acquired the spirit of the city. They are the ones, dear Sisters, who want only what God has given them; they don't aspire after more greatness or riches than they have, and are satisfied with their food and clothing. Still less do they consider using fine words but are humble in their speech. If they=re praised, they don't know what is meant, so they don't listen to it. Their language is truly simple and sincere.

ASisters, how we should love this holy virtue of humility, which causes us to be little concerned if we=re despised, and even prompts us to love contempt! The holy Apostles gloried in contempt, and Saint Paul says, >We have been and are considered apple peelings and the refuse of the world.=[2] That's how Daughters of Charity should look upon themselves, dear Sisters. You'll know that you=re true Daughters of Charity if you=re really humble, if you=re neither ambitious nor presumptuous, and if you don't think you=re better than you are nor better than others, either in body or mind, family or possessions--or even in virtue, which would be the most dangerous form of ambition. Simply make use of God's gifts; if you think you=ve done something good, attribute the glory to God, and imitate true country women who act openly and say frankly what they know, without being too concerned about what they say or do.

AA more certain sign that you=re true Daughters of Charity is if you love contempt, for perhaps you won't lack the opportunity to receive some. And why should you not have any? The Son of God certainly did, and He said that His kingdom was not of this world. And should the kingdom of the Daughters of Charity be of this world? Oh no, Sisters! And may God be blessed that they=re very far from thinking so!

ACountry women, my very dear Sisters, are very abstemious in what they eat. Most of them often make do with bread and soup, although they=re constantly engaged in hard work. That's what you should do, Sisters, if you want to be true Daughters of Charity. Don't be concerned about what's given you, still less whether it's well prepared, but eat only to live. And women from the towns who want to be Daughters of Charity must accept to live likewise. They=re not the only ones who live like that; in many places, people seldom eat bread. In Limousin and other places, they live mainly on bread made from chestnuts. In that part of the country where I come from,[3] dear Sisters, the people are fed on a little grain called millet, which is set to cook in a pot; at mealtime it's poured into a dish, and the family gathers around it to take some for their meal and then go back to work.

AHow necessary moderation is for the Daughters of Charity, Sisters! You'll know that you=re truly abstemious if you maintain the sobriety of country women, especially those who were called from the beginning to serve the poor, for they lived very abstemiously. I'm not telling you to eat only a little bread. Oh no, dear Sisters! Saint Bernard says that enough bread should be eaten, but I'm saying that Daughters of Charity should be content with little for the rest. And may God be praised that you seem to be doing this already! Blessed be God for it! Keep it up, Sisters, if you want to have the spirit of true village girls, in which God called you to the service of the sick poor.

AAlas, Sisters! Don't think you=re fed any worse than persons outside. At any given time, there are always some who are fed much worse than you are, and they have to work hard. A few days ago, Bro. Mathieu[4] wrote to me from Lorraine, and his tear-stained letter informed me of that province's misfortunes, especially the plight of more than six hundred nuns, >The sorrow in my heart is so immense, Monsieur, that I can't express it to you without weeping because of the extreme poverty of these good nuns whom your charity is assisting. I can only depict the smallest part of it to you. Their habits are scarcely recognizable. They are patched all over with green, grey, red--in short, with anything they can get. They even had to wear wooden shoes!=[5]

AThey barely have enough bread to eat. These are all persons of gentle birth, who have been very wealthy. Wouldn't it be disgraceful if Daughters of Charity, servants of the poor, loved to lead a comfortable existence while their masters are suffering in this way! Rest assured then that, if you want to be good, true Daughters of Charity--both those of you who are widows of the upper class and those who actually come from villages--you have to be abstemious and not be on the lookout for appetizing foods. There are no distinctions, no differences, Sisters, when one is a true Daughter of Charity. And do you know, dear Sisters, what the Blessed Virgin lived on when she was on earth, and on what Our Lord subsisted? It was bread. He entered the Pharisee's house to eat bread, Holy Scripture tells us, and this is repeated in several other places. Only once is it stated that He ate meat, and that was when He ate the paschal lamb with His Apostles; on another occasion He ate broiled fish. Blessed be God!

ACountry women like the great Saint Genevieve, dear Sisters, are also very chaste; they never remain alone with men, never look them in the face, never listen to their flattery. They don't even know what it means to be flattered. If someone were to tell a good village girl that she was sweet and pretty, her modesty couldn't tolerate it, and she wouldn't even understand what was being said. So, Sisters, Daughters of Charity must never listen to such language, for to take pleasure in it would be a serious fault. They shouldn't even reply by denying it, for all such talk is silly. Be careful about that.

AAnd if words are so dangerous, what about actions? Never remain alone with men, Sisters, not even with a priest! Never touch the hands of poor persons, unless it's a necessity. Don't even consider whether you=re pleasing or displeasing them, but don't let it show and don't offend them. In a word, Sisters, you'll know that you=re true Daughters of Charity if, when you=re with men, your only concern is the service of the poor, having nothing else in view than to carry out your obligations for the love of God. Be very careful also not to try to attract men either with your eyes or your words. Furthermore, take care not to listen to anything that might be in the slightest way harmful to the purity you must have, in order to share in that of true village girls like Saint Genevieve, who should serve you as a great example. My very dear Sisters, may God be praised for having preserved you until now from all these dangers!

ALet me also add, Sisters, that true country women are very reserved in their demeanor; they keep their eyes cast down and are modest in their clothing, which is coarse and cheap. That's how Daughters of Charity should be. They mustn't go into the homes of the wealthy unless they are there for the service of the poor, and even then they should be discreet, taking no notice of what may be seen there, and speaking to everyone with great reserve and modesty. Recently I was profoundly edified. I had taken a good Brother to a place where we remained a long time. When I asked him about some detail he said, >I'm sorry, Monsieur, I don't know; I didn't notice anything; I couldn't tell you what that is.= This reserve touched me deeply.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! I mention this to encourage you to practice this virtue and to let

you see that, if you want to be true Daughters of Charity, you should take the example of the Blessed Virgin. She was so chaste and discreet that, although greeted by an angel, who told her she was to be the Mother of God, nevertheless, her modesty was so great that, without even looking at him, she was disturbed. Such reserve, my very dear Sisters, should teach you never to do anything to seek to attract men. How dangerous that is, Sisters! Always mistrust yourselves and you'll surely acquire this modesty that's so necessary.

AOur dear Saint Genevieve, good village girl that she was, also had a great love for poverty, and all good Daughters of Charity should be attached to the practice of this virtue. I say *the practice*, Sisters, because it wouldn't be sufficient to love the virtue in the abstract; you have to love the needs that may arise and not complain about what you don't have. Wanting to have what you don't possess, Sisters, isn't the poverty of true country women, who are content with what they have, both in food or clothing. As for their possessions, they never think about them and don't even take into account what they have, but are attached to poverty. They work as if they had nothing; and, Sisters, if you have no ambitions and are content with what has been given you by the grace of God, people will know that you=re true Daughters of Charity. The first persons God called to your way of life have already done this. And what do you think the life of Our Lord and His Holy Mother was like, Sisters? A life of perfect poverty. Don't you remember that all those the Son of God has called to follow Him have learned from Him to practice poverty? >If you wish to be perfect, leave all and follow me.=[6] Have you ever heard, dear Sisters, that anyone who trusted in God was ever disappointed? Oh no, Sisters! He's too good and His promises are genuine. Don't you know that He has promised those who leave all things for the love of God a hundredfold in this world and glory in the next? Isn't it true, dear Sisters, that most of you have experienced the truth of these promises? How many mothers and sisters have you not found for the ones you=ve left? Isn't that true?@ All the Sisters said that it was.

AAs for property, Sisters, I assure you that you=ve gained much more than you left, whatever poverty you may have observed. During the past few days, Sisters, an account was given of everything spent since the first Daughters of Charity came together. How much do you think it amounts to? Twenty thousand livres, Sisters. And where did all that come from if not from the Providence of God, as a result of His promises?

ABlessed be God, Sisters! And how good it is to put our trust in Him! So then, love holy poverty, which will lead you to place all your confidence in God and never worry about your food and clothing. He who provides for little children and the flowers of the field will never fail you. He has given His word, and His words are true. Have you ever seen people with greater confidence in God than good country folk? They sow their seed and then wait for God to bless their harvest; and if God permits that it not be good, they still have confidence in Him for their food for the whole year. Should losses occur, their love of poverty, through submission to God, makes them say, >God gave it to us; God has taken it away; blessed be His Holy Name!= And provided they have enough to live on--which they never lack--they don't worry about the future. Now, Sisters, since your earliest Sisters were first and foremost chosen by God from among good village girls, and from those who had this spirit of poverty the most, don't you have reason to know, by the way you practice this virtue, whether you=re true Daughters of Charity?

AYou must also practice it on this point, namely, not to worry about the future; take care of your expenses throughout the year and, if anything is left over, bring it to the Motherhouse to help to form Sisters for the service of the poor. You have a right only to your food and clothing; the surplus belongs to the service of the poor. Sisters, have you ever heard it said that God chose

poor persons to make them rich in faith? And what do you think of God's choice of village girls for that? Until now, all the women called to God's service have been of gentle birth and wealthy. I repeat, Sisters, how do you know whether, by calling you for His glory and the service of persons who are poor, God isn't trying to test your fidelity in order to demonstrate the truth that God has chosen persons who are poor to make them rich in faith? For poor persons, faith is indeed a great possession, because a lively faith draws from God all we can reasonably hope for. If you=re truly poor, Sisters, you=re even more truly rich, for God is your all. Trust God, dear Sisters. Has anyone ever heard that those who trust in God's promises have been deceived? That has never been seen and never will be. Yes, Sisters, God is faithful to His promises and trusting in Him is a very good thing. Furthermore, this confidence is the entire wealth of the Daughters of Charity and their guarantee. How happy you'll be, Sisters, if you never lack this confidence, for then you'll be true Daughters of Charity and will share in the spirit and good practices of true village girls, who should be your model, since God has made use of them, first and foremost, to begin your Company. Blessed be God, Sisters, for having shown us in Saint Genevieve the goodness of true country women! How consoled I am, my very dear Sisters, when I meet some of you who, I know, have this spirit and some truly magnanimous virtues. Yes, Sisters, some among you are to be admired. Blessed be God, Sisters! When I see and meet on the roads women of quality who really have the spirit of good village girls, with a basket on their back, carrying burdens in the street, and walking with a reserve that inspires devotion, what a great consolation for me, Sisters! God be blessed for the graces He gives them!

AOne of the chief virtues of women who have all the characteristics of country women is holy obedience. This virtue is as necessary--or more necessary--for you than any other, Sisters, because you have to do equally both difficult and easy things. You have to go to places you don't like, as well as to those you do, and to do so without complaining, always thinking that it must be done because your Superiors order it and, consequently, it's God's Will. Be docile and receptive to the guidance of Divine Providence, as a horse is to its rider; go sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, as you=re ordered. But the senses will say, >I was just beginning to get used to that parish, to that neighborhood, to those Ladies. No matter! obedience is taking me away from them; I must leave promptly and cheerfully.= Don't you know, Sisters, that you shouldn't have any friendship in the world that can prejudice the love you must show God by your submission and obedience? There's no greater obedience than that of true village girls. They come home from work, worn out and fatigued, wet through and covered in mud, to eat their meager lunch, and they=re barely there when, if the weather is suitable for work or if their father and mother tell them to go back to it, they do so at once, without paying too much attention to their weariness, or the mud, or how they look. That's how true Daughters of Charity should behave. If they return at noon from serving the sick to have their lunch, and the doctor or another Sister says, >This medicine has to be taken to a patient,= they shouldn't think about the state they=re in, but forget themselves in order to obey, and prefer the convenience of the sick to their own. By this, my very dear Sisters, you'll know that you=re true Daughters of Charity. Blessed be God, Sisters! I think almost all of you are in this state of mind.

ABut, Sisters, do you know how such acts of obedience should be carried out? Joyfully, graciously, and charitably, and not for form's sake or negligently, but with such fervor as to show that you don't want to spare your body in the service of God by serving His poor, and paying no attention to the places to which you=re sent or to the persons who give you orders, but being as prompt in going from one place as to another, whether it be to Paris or to the country,

near or far away. In this way, dear Sisters, you'll be true Daughters of Charity, and you'll be imitating Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin in their obedience with regard to residences and changes of place, by the order and guidance of Divine Providence, which you must consider in all instances where you have to practice holy obedience.

AIn the name of God, Sisters, be very mindful of your obligation to acquire virtue, if you want God to grant you the grace of becoming true Daughters of Charity. If you realized how obliged you are to work toward your perfection, Sisters, and what a misfortune it is to make yourself unworthy of so holy a vocation, you=d weep tears of blood! Yes, Sisters, I repeat, to be called by God for such a holy ministry and not to acknowledge this grace by fulfilling your obligations would merit tears of blood. This thought occurred to a pitiful person like me today, Sisters, when I saw myself as I am, in a state that should make me so perfect. We should all be very much afraid, Sisters! Think of this often and say, >*Quoi!* My God, you=ve chosen me, a poor, weak creature, and placed me in a state that you alone know (Yes, Sisters, God alone knows the perfection of your state), and shall I be so negligent as not to strive to have the prescribed conditions!= What a misfortune it would be for you if through your own fault you were to lose your vocation, or if because of your laxity you didn't take the trouble to acquire the perfection God wants in those who will serve Him in this state! Think about that, Sisters, reflect on it often and seriously, as a matter of the greatest importance. >*Quoi*! I=ve been elected and chosen for such a holy vocation, and I attach such little importance to it!= If you realized what an act of infidelity this is, you=d be horrified. Therefore, Sisters, take good, strong resolutions once again to treasure your vocation more than ever, and try to work with greater fidelity toward the perfection God is asking of you.@ All the Sisters manifested their readiness to do so.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! Blessed be God! I want you to know, Sisters, that, if I=ve ever said anything true and important to you, it's what you=ve just heard, namely, that you must strive to maintain yourselves in the spirit of good, true, country girls. You to whom God, by His grace, has given this spirit by nature should thank Him for it, and those of you who don't have it should strive to acquire the perfection I=ve just pointed out as being characteristic of true village girls. If women of gentle birth present themselves with the desire to enter your Company, Sisters, it must be in order to live, in body and spirit, like those who truly have the virtues of village girls, as our great Saint Genevieve did, so honored now for her simplicity, humility, austerity, modesty, obedience, and all the other virtues we have noted in good village girls. Blessed be God! But what am I saying, Sisters! Those are the virtues practiced by someone even greater--by the Son of God when He was on earth, and by His Holy Mother, whose life you should honor in a special way in all your actions.

AMay the Holy Spirit pour into your hearts the insight you need to enkindle in them a great fervor and make you faithful and attached to the practice of all those virtues so that, for the glory of God, you will esteem your vocation at its true value, and love it in such a way that you may be able to persevere in it for the rest of your life, serving poor persons in the spirit of humility, obedience, suffering, and charity, and so you will be blessed. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.@

14. - UNION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

April 26, 1643

On April 26, our Most Honored Father M. Vincent did us the kindness of giving us a conference on the danger of disunion in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and His Charity said to us, ASisters, our topic for today is very important, since it involves nothing less

than the continuance or the entire dissolution of your Company. So, Sisters, each of us should raise our minds to God, place ourselves in His presence, and entreat Him in His goodness to give us the thoughts we need on this subject. In preceding conferences, I noticed that you needed some help in finding motives or reasons for what had been suggested to you. That's why I felt it would be better to change the method in order to make it easier for you to understand what you will be taught, and this will be a big help to you in making your meditation. I'll use questions and answers, as is done for catechism lessons.

AThis conference has three points. The first concerns the reasons for desiring that no disunion ever arise in your Company. How right it is to desire this, Sisters! If anyone can't give an answer, please don't worry about it because persons who say little sometimes do better, and those who catch on quickly and have no trouble discussing what is proposed to them, sometimes don't do as well, although there are some who speak and do so well. Those who speak well, Sisters, should humble themselves profoundly--that's a gift for which they should express their gratitude to God--and those who have a hard time understanding what is suggested, or have difficulty expressing their thoughts, should put themselves in God's hands and take fresh resolutions to do good.

AWell now, Sister, tell me what reasons we have for desiring that disunion should never arise in the Company, either among individual Sisters or in general; for example, if the whole Company was divided, with some wanting one thing and others something else. First of all, what do you think the word >disunion= means? It means that something that should be whole and entire is divided. Take my body, for instance, all the members together form only one body. They form a union as long as they are joined to the body, but, if my hand were cut off, don't you see that there would be disunion? Now uniformity is what maintains union in the body of a Community: observance of the same Rules, the same way of dressing, and the same harmony. There would be no union if Sisters had contrary desires and complained to others. God grant that this may never happen to your Company! All right, Sister, go ahead.@

AI really had a hard time understanding the meaning of the word >union.= I thought, Monsieur, that it was a virtue Your Charity has frequently explained to us and that all of us should have it in order to do God's Will.@

AAnd you, Sister, why should we desire that there never be any disunion in the Company?@

ABecause, Monsieur, where there's union and harmony, there is love of God and the neighbor, and where there's disunion, we find hatred of God and of the neighbor.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AI think union fosters peace and tranquillity, and disunion causes war and unrest.@

ARight you are, Sister! You see, Sisters, all the wars and misfortunes you witness are the result of disunion, which always causes trouble and unrest.@

AUnion preserves persons in their vocation,@ said another Sister, Aand disunion often causes them to lose it.@

AThat's what usually happens, Sisters. Well now, let's go on; I hope this sort of conference will be more helpful than the others. Don't you think so, Sisters?@ All of them said yes.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! I feel my heart deeply consoled, and I'm as edified as I was ashamed at the last conference--not on your account, Sisters, oh no, but on my own, because of my wretchedness.

AAnd you, Sister, why should we want union always to exist in the Company?@

AMonsieur, disunion seems to me to be like a building that's falling down.@

AThat's so true, Sister. You see a well-built house that seems to be in excellent condition; but, if it should become unstable--if, for instance, a beam should give way--not only would the beam fall but the ceiling as well, so, instead of union, the house would be in confusion. And that's why each individual should be on the watch to avoid discord, for, if it were not put right, the whole body would infallibly feel the effect.

AAnd you, Sister, who come next, tell us some other reason.@

AMonsieur, one compelling reason is that union rejoices or pleases God, who is always present where there's peace. On the contrary, disunion gladdens the devil; a divided heart is like hell--always restless and troubled; and discord, which is born of disunion, puts it in constant turmoil.@

AO Sister, what you just said is so true!@

AUnion,@ said another Sister, Ais the image of the Most Blessed Trinity which is composed of three Divine Persons, united by love. If we=re closely united, we'll all be of one will and in complete harmony. Disunion, on the contrary, would give us a picture of hell, where the demons live in perpetual discord and hatred.@

AYou see, Sisters, how obliged you are to maintain union among yourselves, which is so pleasing to God, so displeasing to the devil, and so useful to yourselves! Be very grateful to God for the grace He gives you to understand this truth!

AAnd you, Sister, what reason do you have for wanting the Community of the Daughters of Charity always to live in perfect union?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that union must give joy to God, because where there's peace, there God is; on the contrary, disunion saddens God and rejoices the devil, who looks only for discord and disunion in order to ruin us.@

AWell said, Sister; God doesn't want to reside where there's disunion, and it was to point this out to us that, when He appeared to His Apostles after His Resurrection, His first words were, >Peace be with you!=[1]

AAnd you, Sister?@

AI think union is the image of the Blessed Trinity. The three Persons are only one same God, united by love from all eternity. We, therefore, should be only one body in several persons, united with the same end in view for the love of God. On the contrary, disunion seems to me like the image of hell, where the devils and the damned are in a state of perpetual discord and hatred.@

AO Sisters, do you see the truth of what this Sister is saying? In no way can there be any disunion in heaven. There was, once; do you know why? When Lucifer and a group of the angels tried to raise themselves above their state, they were immediately hurled into hell, and those who continued to be united in their obedience and submission to God remained, and will remain, eternally in heaven. Should there be any disunion among you and it couldn't be remedied, it would be absolutely necessary to remove those who were causing it.@

AUnion is so excellent,@ said another Sister, Athat Our Lord willed to give himself to us under the beautiful name of Communion. That's why we must ardently desire that union always exist among us, since God loves it so much.@

AAnd what do you think, Sister?@

ASince union is the source of such great benefits, and since disunion, on the contrary, causes such great evils, it seems to me, Monsieur, that we must do our utmost to maintain union among

us.@

AI beg God with all my heart, Sisters, to grant you the grace always to reflect on the necessity of union and to help you to remember all the evils disunion may cause, which you=ve noted, namely, that it drives out the love of God and the neighbor, engenders wars and anxiety, causes the loss of vocation, saddens God, makes souls unworthy of Holy Communion, and separates you from one another. Disunion would cause all those disorders and many others among you, Sisters, whereas union brings many benefits to Communities and to anywhere else it's found.@

AIt seems to me,@ another Sister noted, Athat one of the strongest reasons we have for preventing disunion among ourselves is that, if we were in conflict, we would displease God who loves union so much, not only in reasonable creatures, but even in all the things created by His omnipotence, and that He has provided them in their very nature with means of union, even in those things that oppose each other. And since, when God created our souls, His plan was to unite us to himself, and He sent His Son on earth to help us to do so, we would really be very contemptible if we didn't love union and, by disunion and disorder, put ourselves in danger of losing what God has given us by His love. That would be to oppose oneself deliberately to the most holy Will of God.

AAnother reason for always maintaining perfect union among ourselves is that disunion in the Company would be a hindrance to the reception of God's grace, which it really needs to survive. Otherwise, it could happen that the Company might begin to weaken or--what is worse--might become a scandal to the world, and God wouldn't be glorified by the service His Goodness wants it to render our neighbor for love of Him.@

AIf disunion were to arise among you, Sisters, it could happen that God in His anger might destroy your Company. For those who offended Him in this way this wouldn't be a great shame, for they would thoroughly deserve it, but what a misfortune if we consider the good that's now being done, and the even greater good that could be done! Would there be a hell severe enough to punish those who had committed such a great sin? Watch out for that, Sisters! Blessed be God for having inspired the topic of this conference! I hope much good will result from it. I=ve been greatly consoled by it. And don't you think, Sisters, that it was necessary to discuss this matter?@ All the Sisters expressed their joy at this conference.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! It's His Goodness that inspired all of you to say what you did; but do your best to profit from it, for this must be an important instruction for you, even as useful as a sermon. But what am I saying? Doubtless, anything God inspires you to say should be a sermon for you. Take heart, Sisters!@ And still looking at the Sister to whom he was speaking, he said, ATell us some motive, Sister.@

AWe should greatly fear disunion because if two Sisters visit the sick and have some difference of opinion, it would be very difficult to conceal this; consequently, the neighbor would be scandalized by it.@

AYou see, Sisters, that what this good Sister is saying is true, for the result of disunion is that if one wants to do one thing, the other will want to do something else; people who see this will not be edified, and the poor will have good reason for not accepting in good part the advice they give them for their own good. >Look at those Daughters of Charity,= they'll say, >they don't get along with one another.= How easily disunion, even among individuals, paves the way for the ruin of a Community, Sisters! My body is one in all its members, but just let an incision be made in my hand, causing the flesh to separate, and it will be felt throughout my body. So it is with Communities; when one part is out of harmony, all the rest of it suffers, for those who see this

and are scandalized by it don't simply say, >It's Jeanne and Marguerite who behave like that,= but rather, >It's the Daughters of Charity.= Because for only two who have fallen out, the whole body of the Daughters of Charity suffers and has to endure the scandal, but when all of them are united, how they edify their neighbor, and God is honored by it!@

AMonsieur,@ remarked another Sister, Adisunion is a very bad thing because it drives God from our soul, and we shouldn't even go to Holy Communion when we=re not united.@

AWhat an excellent remark, Sisters, for God forbids those who are at odds with their neighbor from approaching the holy altar, and He has said so in these words, >If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that you have something against your neighbor, go back and be reconciled with your neighbor.=[2] *Quoi!* Sisters, to go to Holy Communion with dissension in your heart, when you are out of harmony with your neighbor, that must not be done! That would be greater cruelty than that of a judge who, to make a man die a miserable death, ordered him to be bound mouth to mouth and stomach to stomach to a corpse so that, as that body decayed, the man who was alive would be infected by the corruption and would die by inches. It would be far worse and more disgraceful to put God, who is life itself and the author of life, in a heart infected with disunion. Isn't this to want to place Jesus Christ among devils? So, Sisters, see if you don't have good reason to prevent disunion among you, since it is so harmful to you! Blessed be God for the knowledge He is giving you about this! Make good use of it.@

ADisunion among us would be a great evil,@ said a Sister, Abecause God couldn't be pleased with the service we would render Him; He=d be offended by the persons who should be glorifying Him. It would cause aversions and complaining among us, and the patients wouldn't be served with charity. That's why we must carefully avoid any disunion among us, both in general and in particular.@

AAs for myself,@ remarked another Sister, AI thought that if I were at variance with others, it would be the worst thing that could happen to me, and my soul would be deeply troubled.@

AThat's true, Sister. And you, Sister?@

AI thought, Monsieur, that we should always try to live together in unity because disunion is contrary to the charity we must have for one another, and that God, in punishment for these faults of ours, would withdraw His grace from us. I thought that if disunion existed among us, God wouldn't make use of us any longer to participate in the graces He wants to bestow on the poor people we=re supposed to serve.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AIt seems to me that, as far as possible, we must prevent disunion from infiltrating the Company, because not only would we be disunited in body, but, what is worse, we would be cut off from God and unable to attain the perfection He asks of us.@ Another Sister noted that it would be difficult for us to have union and charity with outsiders if we were in the habit of being disunited among ourselves.@

AIt seems to me,@ said another, Athat we must always take great care to preserve union among ourselves in order to be an example for those who come after us and to make ourselves pleasing to God. If we were at variance, we would resemble the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, for we would be without charity.@

Another Sister said that we really have to want to be united for love of God, whom we should love dearly.

AI also thought,@ added another Sister, Athat we should love union very much, because

disunion caused the damnation of Lucifer.@

AThat's well said, Sister. Lucifer, like the other angels, was once perfectly united to God; when disunion arose among them, those who caused it were driven out of paradise and sent to hell for all eternity. How dangerous it is to be disunited, Sisters! You=re fortunate that God is giving you the grace not to experience that peril.@

AA sign that God wishes us to be always united,@ remarked another Sister, Ais that even in nature, contrary things have the means of being united. We have to believe that God's intention in creating us is to unite our souls with Him, which presupposes union with our neighbor; otherwise we=d lack charity, which is necessary for union with God.@ Another reason given by the same Sister is that disunion in the Company would place an obstacle in the way of the graces it needs if it is to last; it would follow that it might begin to weaken or, what would be worse, be a cause of scandal to the world. Furthermore, God wouldn't be glorified by the services His Goodness wants to obtain from it.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! Blessed be God! I assure you that this method of holding a conference really edifies me. I can't tell you how much it consoles me, in the hope that it will be helpful to you and that you'll learn by this means how to discover the motives for saying or doing the things that will be proposed to us. I think that those who haven't yet spoken might find even other reasons, but what has been said shows us sufficiently that we have very powerful reasons for always remaining closely united with one another, for we see that union is the source of all sorts of benefits, both spiritual and temporal, and disunion is the cause of all evils, as experience clearly shows us.

ALet's go on to the second point, which is what should be done in the event that there might be any disunion in the Company, both in general and in particular, if, for instance, Marie had fallen out with Françoise, or Barbe with Jeanne, or if some disagreement had arisen in the Company causing Sisters to take sides; for instance, if one side should say, >As for me, I=d like to go to Holy Communion on Thursdays,= and the other might choose some other day. If some were of one opinion and decided on one thing, and others of another, what should be done? Should you takes sides, that is, agree with one side or the other? Most of the Sisters said no, and Most Honored Father continued, AThat's the way it should be, Sisters, we must always suspend our judgment. What should you do, Sister, if you heard that two Sisters had fallen out?@

AI=d have to try to bring them together by excusing both of them.@

AYou=re perfectly correct, Sister. The Bishop of Geneva says in his writings that sometimes two persons get annoyed with each other without rhyme or reason, just as when two heavily laden porters, coming from different directions with their heads down, don't see one another and bang into each other. True, they crashed into one another, but without intending to do so. Sometimes the same thing happens among you. It's true that at times you say or do something without thinking that gives reason for annoyance, but if you had the charity that always prompts you to union, then you certainly wouldn't allow yourselves to get angry. Act like those good porters who don't get into an argument but simply go their way. If someone tells you she's annoyed, say that the Sister with whom she's angry didn't mean it. At times, Sisters, we see some disagreement and disunion among ourselves. Isn't the same true of our own internal organs? You may have heard people say that our bowels occasionally get very upset; they become so twisted that a serious condition may result, and persons sometimes die of it. And you=re well aware that there's no ill will among them because they=re incapable of that. The same applies to you, Sisters; always live in such perfect union that, by God's grace, you'll be

incapable of getting angry with one another. If a Sister complains to you about another, excuse the latter and say, >Sister dear, our Sister never meant to annoy you.=

AAnd you, dear Sister, what should be done?@

AIn the first place, when we reflect on the great benefits that come from being united and the great evils caused by disunion, with hearts filled with charity we should ask God for the grace to be able to help our Sisters with that.@

AAnd what do you think, Sister? What should be done if this evil of disunion should arise?@

AMonsieur, we should pray for Sisters who may be in such a state.@

AShouldn't you do some penance for them, Sisters, such as taking the discipline or some other act of austerity? That would be one good means. But what else should be done, Sister?@

AI think we should make inquiries individually, Monsieur, before blaming either one, then try to get both of them to be reconciled--I mean, to ask each other's forgiveness.@

AAsking pardon of one another, Sisters, is an excellent means of preserving union!@

A Sister then said, AWould you allow me, Monsieur, to ask pardon right now of my Sisters for having complained because I thought some of them had snubbed me in the street, and also to ask pardon of the Sisters to whom I complained?@

AMost willingly, Sister.@ The Sister knelt down, and so did all the others, and she then asked pardon with great humility naming each Sister in turn.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! That's what should be done to preserve perfect union. One day I was speaking with the Superior of the Ursuline nuns of Gisors, and she told me about the union and harmony that existed among her Sisters.>But what do you do, Mother,= I asked her in astonishment, >to have such tranquillity in your Community that there's never any difference of opinion?= >Monsieur,= she replied, >as soon as some cause for disagreement arises, our Sisters have the custom of kneeling down and asking forgiveness of each other, so that no disunion may come into it.= What an excellent means, Sisters! Love to practice this--and the sooner the better--when you see a Sister is annoyed, or has reason to be annoyed, with you.@

ABut, Monsieur, sometimes if we try to ask a Sister's forgiveness, she laughs at it or becomes even more irritated; what should be done then?@

ASisters, if you see that the Sister, either because she's very angry or in a bad mood or has in mind some other reason for being displeased, is incapable of accepting your act of humility in a good spirit, don't ask for forgiveness at that time; that would be heaping coals on the fire; you=d put her in danger of becoming even more bitter. Wait until she's in a better frame of mind, then ask pardon with as much humility as you can, acknowledging before God that you are responsible for the harm she has done.

AAnd you, Sister, if several members of the Company were disunited, what would you do to restore the union that's so necessary in your Company?@

AMonsieur, I=d tell Superiors about it, along with what I knew about the reason for the disagreement.@

AThat's right, Sister, for we have to believe that God will bless abundantly what Superiors will do about this. Always bear in mind, Sisters, the necessity of this union, on account of the great benefits that result from it, as you=ve said, and the great evils disunion brings, especially the ones God has inspired you to mention. It's God who has caused you to speak in that way, Sisters. May He be forever blessed for it!

AAnd what steps should be taken to intervene? Should we mention it to all the Sisters? You

see, Sisters, if two Sisters fall out, you should speak to each of them separately and, after they=ve told you why they=re displeased, remind them of the forbearance they owe to one another. For just imagine, Sisters, sometimes the slightest trifle is enough to make us angry! Occasionally, people have aversions for one another without even knowing why. Often enough, it's a little envy or jealousy. Antipathy for a Sister may even come from hearing her eat or seeing how she does some other action. If you persisted in this aversion, it would certainly cause disunion. Do your utmost to overcome it, Sisters, and, if there's any disunion, speak to the Sisters in private.@

After obtaining M. Vincent's permission, a Sister asked if, in case of disunion, it was advisable for all the Sisters indiscriminately to come together to find some way to settle it. Most Honored Father led us to understand that, as far as possible, everyone should contribute to promoting union among the Sisters, encouraging some, soothing others, and always excusing the absent, but if it was a matter of importance and disunion already existed, then the Superior or Superioress would have to be informed.

AIsn't this what all of you wish? Don't you want to give yourselves to God beginning right now, to accept that your faults be charitably mentioned to the one who holds the place of Superioress for you?@ All the Sisters said yes quite willingly and agreed with cordial consent. Our dearest Father then said in his usual fashion, ABlessed be God, Sister! That is indeed a very powerful means of maintaining the Company in great peace and union, and the subject of this conference is one of the most important I know of for the existence of the Company.

AToday I was talking to a good priest, Fr. Saint-Jure,[3] who is very devout; he composed those beautiful meditations that we read aloud. I asked him how it is that, in Communities, although all the members have the same desire to serve God and the same will to work at their perfection, slight dissensions still arise.>It's like this, Monsieur,= he said to me, >rustic people take offense far more easily than those who are intelligent and refined. The simplest means to keep them in peace is to accustom them to reconciliation.= Now, you see, Sisters, most of you--and a poor keeper of pigs like myself as well--belong to that class brought up in the country.@ (I'm quoting these words, which Most Honored Father often took pleasure in repeating at very distinguished gatherings, such as those of Bishops, Abbots, Princesses, and other great Ladies who attend the meetings of the Charity.) AYou must remember that,@ he continued, Aand, when you=re annoyed with your Sisters, be sure that it's not usually for the reason you imagine, but because of your frame of mind.@

Another Sister said that she thought the best thing was to call attention as soon as possible to the disagreement among Sisters who had fallen out, then to ask God's pardon for them and to humble ourselves profoundly at the thought that each one of us is capable of similar faults. She added that if, unfortunately, our infidelities, failure to observe the Rules, disobedience, complaints, and carelessness in mending our ways and advancing in the perfection of the love of God were to draw down His indignation on the whole Company, it would be desirable for each Sister to begin to do penance to implore God's mercy. Furthermore, a conference should also be held and a strict visitation made to discover the root of the evil, and the persons who had caused it should be dismissed from the Company, if there were no hope of amendment. AIf the evil couldn't be remedied,@ she added, AI think it would be better to abolish the Company entirely by gentle and charitable means because, just as God will be greatly honored by it as long as it preserves union and obedience to Superiors, the Company would also be a source of great evils if it no longer did this. I'm ready from now on to endure the shame that would result from this disorder, acknowledging that I have enough shortcomings of my own to be the sole cause of it.@

M. Vincent then questioned another Sister, who replied, AIf this misfortune were to befall me, Monsieur, I would be more careful not to give my Sisters any more cause for displeasure, and would want them to profit from the pain I might have caused them, in order to advance in the perfection that God is asking of them.@ Another Sister said that, should she have some disagreement with a Sister, she would ask her forgiveness in private before going to bed, and then that of the whole community.

Thoughts of another Sister: ADuring my meditation I thought that if I saw any disunion in the Company, among others or in myself, I=d inform the Superior or Superioress of it as soon as possible, mentioning the fault quite simply, without excusing myself or complaining about it, even to Sisters in whom I had the greatest confidence.@

Another Sister said she would kneel before the crucifix to ask pardon for her fault and ask the Blessed Virgin to intercede for her. Then she would go to her Superiors quite simply and request some penance, with the conviction that there was none too great for this fault. She would also ask pardon of the Sister whom she had offended and promise her and her Superiors that she would behave better in future toward her Sisters, love them more tenderly, and show them greater cordiality and deference. Another Sister said that if she had a difference with a Sister, she=d ask her forgiveness, show her how sorry she was, and try to be more friendly to her than previously.

AAnd you, Sister, what should be done to correct this great evil of disunion, should it occur?@

AWe should be glad to be reminded of our faults, and listen to the advice given us so we can put it into practice.@

There were far more Sisters at this meeting than there were reasons given for avoiding this evil, and means for remedying it. Since several had the same thoughts, I will not repeat what each one said. At the end, a Sister[4] very humbly asked M. Vincent, for the love of God and in the name of the whole Company, to offer at the holy altar the earnest desires of the Sisters, to obtain for us from God pardon for the faults committed against our Rules and the bad use we had made of the instructions His Charity had been giving us for so long a time, and to ask God for fresh graces for the full accomplishment of the holy plans He has had for the Company from all eternity.

AYes, Sisters,@ replied M. Vincent, AI'll be very glad to say Mass for this intention, but not within the next few days because I have to say it for our good King.[5] I ask all of you to receive Holy Communion for his intention, that God may be pleased to restore him to health or, if His Goodness deems it expedient for His glory, to maintain him in the state in which he was on Thursday, when he thought he was dying and was facing death in a noble and Christian manner.@

The same Sister asked M. Vincent if he thought it proper for the Sisters to accuse themselves publicly at the meetings, in his presence and that of all the Sisters, of the faults they had committed, especially against the resolutions they had just taken. AWhat a good means that is your perfection, Sisters! I=d have you know that, if from doing this act in private you obtain one degree of grace from God, when you do it in public you'll obtain as many graces as you'll have witnesses of this action.

AI assure you once more, Sisters, that I'm deeply consoled by this conference. We have to leave the third point for the next one, which we'll hold as soon as possible, God willing. At that meeting we'll discuss the means of preventing disunion in your Company. So, make your

meditation again on this subject.

AMay the Divine Goodness, Source of true union, grant you the grace to avoid all the evils that may be caused by disunion. May God keep you always in perfect union with himself and with your neighbor by true charity, and with yourselves by mortification of your senses and your bad habits, all for His glory. May God bless you! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

15. - EXPLANATION OF THE REGULATIONS

[June 14, 1643]

On June 14, 1643, our Most Honored Father M. Vincent did us the charity of discussing with us the Regulations and way of life of the Daughters of Charity, as a result of the request of a parish Sister to let her have in writing the practices observed in the house.[1] Most Honored Father had not yet made up his mind whether to have a written text; from this we have reason to believe that Divine Providence has reserved to itself the guidance of this work, which it advances and holds back, according to its pleasure.

AThe subject of this conference, dear Sisters, will be the Rules and way of life you set up for yourselves long ago and which you=re living, by the grace of God. You yourselves have decided on them--or rather God inspired you with them, for we can't say that they were given to you, Sisters. Who would ever have thought that there would be Daughters of Charity when the first of you came to a few parishes here in Paris? Oh no, Sisters! I didn't think of it; neither did your Sister Servant nor M. Portail. God thought of it for you. We can say, Sisters, that He's the Author of your Company, much more truly so than anyone else. Blessed be God, Sisters, that you--poor country women for the most part--have been chosen by His Goodness to form a Company which, with the help of His grace, will serve Him!

ASisters, I think you have made your meditation on this subject. The first point deals with the necessity for every Company to have a Rule or way of life conformable to the service God wants it to render Him. That's quite clear; for there's a Rule, not only in religious houses but everywhere. We who aren't religious--and never will be because we don't merit it--have one. The Fathers of the Oratory, whom I should have mentioned first, have one. It's difficult and even impossible for Communities to preserve uniformity without a Rule. What a state of disorder there would be if one person wanted to rise at one time and another at another! That would be a state of disunion rather than of union.

ASo, Sisters, let me tell you the few thoughts that have occurred to me on this topic, because I haven't had time to reflect a great deal on it.

AThe first reason is that it's necessary, as I=ve just said; it always has been and always will be. Rules are established in the order of nature; God even wrote some with His own finger for the people of Israel and willed that His law should be ever before their eyes. Perhaps this will also be advisable for your Rules, Sisters. At any rate, it's essential that each of you has a copy of the Rules to help you to observe them exactly.

AAnother reason, Sisters, is that God is pleased by this. What a happiness, Sisters, to be able to please God! Don't you see, Sisters, the special delight we take in pleasing those we love? People regard it as a special honor and pleasure to please a King--an earthly King--who, according to nature, is no greater than any other man, subject to the same necessities and weaknesses. We had an instance of this recently in the person of our late good King, of very happy memory, who suffered so much and who, after his death, was found to have worms in his

mesentery and one in his stomach. Sisters, if people work with so much delight and assiduity to please an earthly King, from whom only empty, earthly rewards can be expected, with far greater reason should you strive to please God, who is the King of Kings, and who rewards with eternal happiness those who love and serve Him.

AAnother reason, Sisters, is that it's easy to observe your Rules. They=re divided into two parts. The first tells you, in fifteen articles, how the day should be spent; that is, everything you should do at every hour. The second part contains some recommendations to help you to do it properly.

AI'm well aware that there'll be a little diversity in your Regulations because of the different kinds of poor people you serve, but for your principal activities, all of them can, nevertheless, apply. And should it be necessary to alter something for the service of the convicts, the children, the poor in the parishes, and the Sisters in the rural areas, it will be done. I think all of you will be able to live like those in this house; it's to be desired that your activities be as those of the Sisters here.

ASo I tell you, Sisters, that the observance of your way of life is very easy. There's nothing easier and more pleasant than to rise at four o=clock, to offer your first thoughts to God, to kneel down to adore Him and to offer yourself to Him. Now, isn't that really easy?

AAs for making your mental prayer, that is, to speak with God for half an hour, what an opportunity and what joy that is! As a rule, people are fortunate to be able to speak to a King; those who find it hard to speak to God for half an hour lack discernment.

AIt's not hard to take medicines to the sick and to hear Mass on your return home, either. At the time the soup is to be taken to the sick, go to the house of the Lady who prepares it--or go a little earlier, if need be, as is sometimes necessary, for fear that the servants don't find it ready at the right time. And what difficulty do you find in making your particular examination of conscience before dinner and saying grace before and after meals?

AAfter dinner, be sure to get the doctor's orders and to prepare and take the medicines to the sick. That's very easy. Afterward, take time to read a chapter of some book of devotion. Don't ever miss this, Sisters; it's something very easy and very necessary; for, in the morning you speak to God at mental prayer; and in your reading, God speaks to you. If you want your prayers to be heard by God, listen to God in the reading. There's no less benefit and happiness in listening to God than in speaking to Him. That's why I strongly recommend that you do your utmost not to miss it and, if possible, to spend a little time in prayer afterward.

AIt will also be easy for you to make your particular examination of conscience before supper. Before going to bed, make the general examination of conscience, retire at nine o=clock, and to go to sleep with some good thought. Isn't all that very easy, and what reasons could you have for not doing it?

AIn addition to what I=ve told you, you should recite your Rosary in several parts; for instance, one decade after morning meditation, two in church before Mass--or up to the Gospel if Mass begins sooner--two more after reading in the afternoon, and one in the evening. If those times are inconvenient, you=re permitted to select others.

AGo to confession and Holy Communion on Sundays and the principal feast days, and not more often without your Director's permission. I strongly recommend that you be exact on this very important point, Sisters. I'm well aware that there may be several who would like to go more often, but, for the love of God, mortify yourselves in this respect, and reflect that a spiritual Communion well made will sometimes be more efficacious than an actual one. I know this is so,

Sisters, and I'll tell you frankly that too frequent Communions have been the cause of great abuses--not because of Holy Communion itself, but because of the bad dispositions people often bring to it. So, Sisters, please don't receive Communion more frequently, without permission from your Director.[2]

AIt's also very important not to remain idle. Spend your time sewing or spinning, when you have nothing more to do for your patients. Sisters, you have to work for a living and be very exact in the use of time, of which God will demand a strict account of you. He said so himself, >I will ask you to give back the time that has gone.= The good use of time is so precious, and the time at our disposal on earth can be so valuable to us that we should take great care not to waste any of it. Wretched man that I am, what shall I say to God when He asks me for an account of the time I waste!

AThe second part of your Rules, Sisters, consists of certain recommendations, contained in seventeen articles, to observe the daily schedule well, to do all you have to do in a spirit of humility, charity, and gentleness, and to the holy life of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. You should form your intention for that at the beginning of each action, and especially when you devote yourselves to the service of your sick poor. What a happiness, Sisters, to serve the person of Our Lord in His poor members! He has told you that He'll consider this service as done to himself.

AShow great honor to the Ladies. Isn't it only just to speak respectfully to them and to obey them in all that concerns the service of the poor? They=re the ones who give you the means of rendering to God the service you give to the patients. What could you do without the Ladies, Sisters? So, show them great respect, no matter what their class. I have to tell you that I=ve noticed that several Sisters are at fault in this. From now on, carefully avoid this, in speaking both to them and about them. They have a very high regard for you and love you, but you mustn't abuse that.

AYou should act in the same way toward the physicians. Don't find fault with their orders, Sisters, nor prepare your medicines using other ingredients. Be meticulous in following what they tell you for the dosage as well as for the drugs. Sometimes people's lives are at stake in that. So, respect the physicians not only because they=re better and wiser than you but also because God commands you to do so in Holy Scripture, where there's a passage that states explicitly, >Hold the physician in honor, for he is essential to you.=[3] Kings themselves honor them, as do all the great ones of the earth. So why wouldn't you, under the pretext that they are well known to you and speak freely to you, show them the honor and respect you owe them? Please watch out for this, Sisters. Even though you may sometimes think that one of them isn't as competent as another, refrain from misjudging them because it's ignorance that prevents you from knowing why physicians use different methods to treat patients, which, nevertheless, produce similar results. That's why, Sisters, you must always show them great respect.

AYou must also remember that your principal concern, which God asks especially of you, is to be very attentive in serving the poor, who are our lords. Oh yes, Sisters! They are our masters. That's why you must treat them gently and kindly, reflecting that this is why God has brought you together; and why He formed your Company. You must see that, as far as in you lies, they want for nothing, both with regard to their physical health and for the salvation of their souls. How blessed you are, Sisters, that God has destined you for this for your entire life!

APeople in the highest places consider it an honor to spend a small part of their time doing this, and they do it with such charity and fervor! You Sisters who are at Saint-Sulpice, you see

this in those good Princesses and great ladies when you accompany them there! How greatly you should appreciate your state in life, Sisters, since you=re in a position to perform works of charity every day at all hours, and that is the means God has used to sanctify so many souls! Yes, Sisters, didn't Saint Louis[4] serve the poor at the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris with such great humility that it helped to make him a saint? All the saints--or most of them--have considered it a happiness to please God by this means. Humble yourselves profoundly and remember that this is for you a grace of God far above what you have merited.

A*Quoi*! Because of this the world respects and honors you and admires what God wills to do through you. I=ve just come from the Queen; she spoke to me about you. Sisters, you have good reason to fear that you may become unfaithful to God and ungrateful for His graces if you don't take the trouble to put into practice the Rules He has arranged to be to given you.

ARefrain from talking too much. Being garrulous is a serious fault, Sisters, and is unbecoming, especially in Daughters of Charity, who should be much more reserved than others. You should also keep silence at the times of rising and going to bed, that is, from reading in the evening until after meditation the next day. What a good practice it is to keep silence, Sisters! It's in silence that we can hear God speaking to our hearts. Be very faithful to that. If necessity requires that you speak, do so in a low tone of voice and in few words. That practice will help you to become devout.

AThe sixth article dictates that you be very reserved on all occasions. You should have a great regard for this virtue, Sisters, for, if people were to see a Daughter of Charity behaving improperly in the street, looking all around her, they would soon say, >That Sister will leave.= If several Sisters behaved like that, there would be grounds for thinking that the Company might soon disappear. This is a very important matter, Sisters. But we have also good reason to praise God, and I can tell you that whenever I meet any of you in the streets I'm edified by your modesty. God be blessed for it! I=ve always remembered the modesty and reserve of a Sister who was coming from a certain place; when I asked her with whom she had been speaking, she replied, >Well, Monsieur, I really didn't notice.= Sisters, that's the way to behave.

AYou should never pay nor receive a visit, nor allow anyone to remain in your rooms when by doing so you=d be kept from your spiritual exercises. Should you acquire such a habit, it would be a significant fault; gradually it would consume all your time and lead you to be in too much of a hurry when serving your patients, and, what is worse, it's to be feared that in the course of time you might neglect them to such an extent that the thought of the persons you=d be going to see and those who=d be coming to see you in your rooms would take up most of your time and attention. This is a very important and dangerous point, Sisters! Be very careful about it, and don't be afraid to say, >Please excuse us; this is the time for our meal, for our prayers, and we can't postpone them to some other time.= You see, Sisters, even if, at the time they=re talking with you, you might think they'll take it badly, don't hesitate. When they reflect on it, they'll give you more praise than blame, and you'll have the consolation of having replied on that occasion as God would want you to do. What a happiness, Sisters, to feel sure that you=re doing what God wills by observing your Rules. So, when someone says to you, >You don't come to see me,= reply firmly, >Madame, please excuse me, we should never pay any visit.=

AYou must live in close union and never complain of one another. Great forbearance is needed for this, Sisters, because no one is perfect. If we don't bear with our Sister, why should we feel that she is supposed to bear with us? This doesn't mean, Sisters, that some slight difference of opinion may not arise at times: one Sister will want to do one thing, and her Sister

another, and what each one wants isn't bad; nevertheless, if there isn't some yielding, if one doesn't give in to the other, there will be disunion. For this reason, Sisters, in God's name anticipate one another and say, >Very well, Sister, since that's what you want, I agree.= That's the real way to be always united, Sisters. Shouldn't we also act in this way toward ourselves, who aren't of the same mind for long because today we want one thing, and tomorrow it's something else? And if we don't bear with ourselves in these changing moods, we'll never have peace and tranquillity. Be very careful not to complain about one another, either to the Ladies, your confessors, or any of your Sisters, or to dwell voluntarily on feelings of aversion that may sometimes arise.

AHere, Sisters, is another great means to maintain union and cordiality among you: if you see that you=ve saddened a Sister, ask her forgiveness--at once, if you can, or at least in the evening because to go to bed with anger in your heart is great cowardice. Not only is this the duty of Daughters of Charity, but of every good Christian as well, since God has said, >Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath.=[5] There are people in the world who act in this way.

AAgain, Sisters, although you may all be equal and alike in everything, the Rule states, nevertheless, that where two or three of you are together, one should be appointed Sister Servant. You must submit humbly and willingly to that Sister, regarding her in God and God in her. It will be very easy for you to submit if you reflect that she represents the presence of God for you and if you regard her in God, for it's by the guidance of Divine Providence that you=re together; you should, consequently, respect her. On her part, the Sister Servant must avoid being overbearing or authoritative with her Sister but should act gently and affably, reflecting that charity is gentle, kind, patient, and endures all things.[6] Now, a Sister wouldn't be a true Daughter of Charity if she didn't imitate her mother.

AShow great respect for one another, Sisters, bearing in mind that you=re equally in the service of the same Master and so are bound to hold one another in greater honor than if you were in the service of the greatest lords in the world. This is a piece of advice Our Lord himself gives us: >Anticipate one another in showing honor.=[7] How blessed and edifying your Company will be if you do so, Sisters! Never argue with one another, but rather give up your own will in order to do that of your Sister--I mean in matters that aren't sinful or contrary to your way of life. It sometimes happens, however, that matters of no importance give rise to disputes of such a kind that we make a mountain out of a molehill. The devil, our enemy and the father of discord, is only too pleased for us to become disunited by this means. We have to be very careful of this, Sisters, and love to please God rather than to gratify our own passions.

AHere's another article that instructs you not to give or receive anything without permission of the Sister Servant, who is in charge of the house. This point, Sisters, is more important than you think. As soon as you enter a Company, in which no one should possess anything of her own, everything you have is no longer yours but belongs to your Sisters as well as to yourself. That's why you=re not free to give or receive anything without permission. If it's in any way important, the Sister Servant must ask the Superior's permission. If it's a small thing, she can give permission to accept it or give it away. If you=re in a hurry and don't have time to ask for permission you must intend to mention it afterward to your Sister Servant in a spirit of submission, ready to give up or to keep the object, according to her orders. Isn't that right, Sisters? What a powerful means to make you virtuous! Blessed be God!

AHere's another article that's very necessary: you will take care to come at least once a month to the Motherhouse and to do so at the most convenient time. And why, Sisters? To spend

a little time speaking in a friendly cordial way with the Sister Servant about your spiritual state, like a child who might come to its mother for some consolation, to tell her your troubles great and small, to ask her advice according to your needs, to give her an account of how you are practicing your Rules, of your behavior, and of your little differences of opinion, should there be any, doing so quite sincerely, cordially, and honestly. Sisters, the little trials of life are no longer trials with these consolations, or, if they persist, God will give you the grace to love them for love of Him. It's not enough for you to reveal your faults and worries, you should also mention quite simply the graces God has granted you. There are five or six articles about which you should speak. You'll be advised about them.

AHere's one that will be a great help to you, Sisters, in observing your Rules and spiritual exercises well: don't fail to be present at meetings when you=re notified of them, no matter what excuse you may have. If a Lady wants you with her at such a time, you have to say to her, >Madame, I ask you most humbly to allow us to go to the meeting being held at home. We=re obliged to be present, and have made arrangements so that the patients won't need anything during our absence.= If you speak to them like that, they'll be very careful not to keep you from them; otherwise, you=d lose a great deal, Sisters, because God, who knows your needs, sometimes allows you to hear at these meetings something useful that you wouldn't hear elsewhere. Furthermore, Sisters, there's always a great blessing attached to attending these meetings, since Our Lord has told us that when we=re gathered together in His name, He'll be in the midst of us. Tell me, Sisters, isn't He really and truly Our Lord? And since it can't be otherwise, why don't we believe Him? Sisters, I believe it as firmly as if I saw Him here in the midst of us, unworthy though I am; yes, Sisters, I believe it more firmly than I believe that I see all of you here. So, please don't fail to be present at them.

AIn addition, Sisters, have no attachments either to places, persons, or duties, and always be prepared to leave everything when obedience withdraws you from some place, being convinced that God wills it that way. This is the most important thing I could say to you. Without this general detachment, it's impossible for your Company to last. And, Sisters, you shouldn't want to be left in a place for your own satisfaction, when it's necessary to withdraw you from it and to send you elsewhere or to come to the Motherhouse. Another Sister would act like you, and then another, and the spread of this disorder would result in the total ruin of the Company and the cessation of all the good being done and that can be done by others, if you=re faithful to God. What a misfortune, Sisters, for the Sister who was the primary cause of this disorder! God forbid that this should ever happen! Be very careful, Sisters, that no attachments creep in imperceptibly among you that might prevent you from being pliable in the hand of God, for the result could be that you might not go to the place where God in His goodness intended to do you the favor of using you.

AAlthough I recommend to you the exact observance of your Rules and your way of life, and to love to conform yourselves to all that's done in this house, which is the heart of the Company, nevertheless, since your primary obligation is the care of the sick poor, you should never be afraid to set aside some Rules when the needs of the poor are urgent, provided it's a real necessity and you=re not neglecting them through mere natural inclination or laziness.

AThat, Sisters, is the last article concerning your way of life. You=re being given a copy so you may read it at least once a month. This is imperative. Through this reading, you'll know the Will of God, and be motivated to put it into practice.

AMay God grant you the grace to do so, Sisters! It will be a means for you to become true

Daughters of Charity--Sisters pleasing to God. I tell you--and it's so true--that those who are very exact in keeping and practicing these Rules will soon attain very great perfection and holiness. What could deter you from doing so, Sisters? They=re so easy! You know they make you pleasing to God and that by following them you do His most holy Will. If you=re really faithful in the observance of this way of life, Sisters, you'll all be good Christians. I wouldn't be saying as much if I told you that you=d be good nuns. Why do people join religious Orders if not to become good Christian men and women? Yes, Sisters, really make it a point to become good Christian women by the faithful practice of your Rules. God will be glorified by it, and your Company will edify the whole Church. Don't underestimate the grace God has given and will give you, if you render yourselves worthy of it. Reflect that lately God has willed to provide His Church with a Company of poor country women--as are most of you--to continue the life His Son led on earth. Don't make yourselves unworthy of your grace, Sisters. For this purpose, I ask God, Sisters, to give you perfect union.

AO my God, we give ourselves to You for the accomplishment of your plan for us; we acknowledge that we are unworthy of this grace, but we ask it of You through the love of Your Son; we ask it of You through the Blessed Virgin; and we ask it of You through our Sisters whom, in Your goodness, You have already taken to Yourself in Your holy paradise. Grant it to us for Your glory, Lord, and bless us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

16. - THE FOUNDLINGS[1]

December 7, 1643

A Sister thought that one motive for serving these little children with great care and affection is that their souls are made in the image of God. She also mentioned that Our Lord always loved poor little children, for He told His Apostles to let them approach Him, and taught us that we must be like them in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

ATo serve them well it is good to recall all those truths and hope that their little examples will be useful to us in trying to acquire the virtues by which we'll be considered by God as little children.@

ABlessed be God, Sister! I'm really consoled to see the thoughts God is giving all of you. Have no doubt about it; there's reason to hope for many graces while serving these poor little creatures, abandoned by all but Divine Providence, who has chosen you to serve them.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Awe should consider ourselves very fortunate that God has given us charge of these babies, among whom many will perhaps give great glory to God either on their own or through the instruction they'll be able to give to others.

AAnother reason is that we must believe that God wills us to have this ministry, since He himself inspired our Superiors with the idea, and also the fear that, if we don't do our duties well, He may entrust this work to others who will do so. I also thought that carrying out this ministry well is a means of attaining our salvation.@

Reflections of another Sister: AFather, these children, who in all probability are doubly conceived in sin, represent to us a very thorny plant that God is unwilling to throw into the fire, but from which He wants to gather roses; and these roses are their rational souls, which He has created and redeemed by the blood and death of His Son. This thought has given me a great desire to serve them.@

Reflections of another Sister: AFather, there are five principal reasons why we should have a great desire to serve these little creatures, abandoned by everyone. The first is the obligation of

procuring God's glory in every way we can, by taking care of these little bodies for love of God, instructing their souls, and giving them good example so that they may one day glorify God in eternity.

AThe second motive is that, since these little bodies are doubly conceived in sin, there's reason to believe the devil will have greater power to lead them into sin and will do his best to send most of them to hell. We have to prevent that because we=re obliged, under pain of sin, to rescue our neighbor from death when we can do so, and the death of the soul has far greater consequences than that of the body.

AThe third reason is the example God himself gave us of a child in this state, abandoned by Hagar its mother. Hagar was visited by an angel, who commanded her on the part of God to take care of her child. She picked him up, humbled herself, and by her tears touched the heart of Abraham's legitimate wife, who took her into her home.[2]

AThe fourth motive is that we should attach great importance to the plan God had in mind in choosing us for this work, which we should cherish above any we could imagine.

AThe fifth motive is that the service rendered to these little children is one of the most powerful means we have for advancing in perfection; in it we learn how to overcome ourselves in many of our passions and to avoid idleness.

AOne of the first means of serving these babies well is to think that we=re not capable of doing so, to remind God frequently of our inadequacy, and to ask Him for the grace of teaching us how to serve them most profitably for His glory and their salvation.

AIn the second place, to reverence these babies as the children of God, and remind ourselves that Our Lord has told us to give them good example because their angels behold continually the face of God.

AIn the third place, to be very attentive to whatever they may need and to see that they lack nothing.

AFourth, not to show more affection for some rather than for others because favoritism causes jealousy and envy, to which these little children can become habituated.

AFifth, to see to the practice of the Rules: first, in order to be faithful to God, and then, for the children's welfare. If they=re taken care of at the right times, they'll be much healthier.@

ABlessed be God, dear Sisters, for the thoughts He has given all of you! They=ve truly consoled me, and I can't express to you the joy my heart experiences from them, especially because almost all of you have resolved, when holy obedience sends you to help these little ones, to go to serve them with charity, gentleness, and affection. It's God, Sisters, who gives you this good will. Foster it carefully.

AReflecting on the guidance of Divine Providence in your regard, I=ve been extremely amazed, Sisters, at the choice made of you from all eternity--you, poor village girls, without experience or knowledge--to the exclusion of many others, to render Him this service, the most important one I know, along with the service rendered Him by the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu. How grateful you should be for this grace, Sisters! *Quoi!* From all eternity God was thinking of you for such an important work! Not only was He thinking of establishing a Company for this purpose, but He was even contemplating choosing each one of you in particular to be part of it. Sisters, if you really understand God's plan for you, you'll consider yourselves fortunate for that mercy. May Our Lord grant you this grace!

AA second remark, dear Sisters, is that these little children belong to God in a very special manner, since they=ve been abandoned by both father and mother, and have, nevertheless,

rational souls created by the omnipotence of God. They belong to God alone, who acts as father and mother to them and provides for their wants.

ASee what God is doing for them and for you, Sisters. From all eternity He singled out this age in order to inspire a large number of Ladies with the desire to take over the care and guidance of these little ones, whom He regards as His own, and from all eternity He has chosen you, Sisters, to serve them. What an honor for you! If persons in the world consider it a great honor to serve the children of the great, how much more should you who have been called to serve the children of God!

ARecently I was in a place where the King[3] was taking a walk. >Sire,= said his governess to him, when she saw the Chancellor arriving, >Sire, give your hand to the Chancellor.= >*O mon Dieu!*= cried the Chancellor, making a profound bow, >I'm very careful not to touch the King's hand; I'm not God.= You see, Sisters, he's a King because he's the son of a King, and if the Chancellor, who is one of the highest officers of his Crown, doesn't dare, out of respect, to touch his hand, what sentiments you should have while serving these babies who are the children of God! Sisters, give yourselves to God to serve them with great charity and gentleness, and accustom yourselves to see God in them, and to serve them in God and for His love. What a powerful motive, Sisters! You must conclude from this that God is very pleased at the sight of the service you render them.

AAnother motive, Sisters, is the great pleasure God takes in the service you render these babies, just as He also does in their little babbling--even in their little cries and wailings. Each of these cries touches the heart of God with pity. And when they begin to cry and you comfort them, dear Sisters, rendering them the services they need for the love of God and to honor the infancy of Our Lord, don't you give pleasure to God? And isn't God honored by the cries and wailings of these little children? Courage then, Sisters! Have a great love for the service of these little children from whose mouths God receives perfect praise. It's not I who say this, Sisters, but the prophet, *Ex ore infantium et lactentium perfecisti laudem tuam.*[4] But I'm saying it in Latin. It's meaning, Sisters, is: >Your praise is perfect in the mouths of little sucklings.= So this is true, Sisters, because Holy Scripture affirms it.

ASee how fortunate you are to render service to these little creatures, who give God perfect praise, and in whom the goodness of God takes so much pleasure--a pleasure in some sort similar to that of mothers who have no greater comfort than to observe the little actions of their young ones. They marvel at everything and love it all. In like manner God, who is their Father, takes great pleasure in all their little actions. Do the same, dear Sisters. Consider yourselves their mothers. What an honor to consider yourselves the mothers of children of whom God is the father! And as such, take pleasure in looking after them, in doing all you can for their care. In this, Sisters, you'll resemble in a certain sense the Blessed Virgin, because you'll be at one and the same time both mothers and virgins. Get used to looking upon these little children in that way, and it will ease the difficulty of dealing with them, for I'm well aware that there's difficulty in that.

AThink also about the affection good mothers have for their children. They'll risk all sorts of dangers to rescue them from a trifling difficulty, Sisters. And what I say is true even of mothers in the animal world, such as mother quails that allow themselves to be captured by hunters in order to save their chicks. When you take good care of these poor babies and give them all they need, then you'll be acting as their true mothers. How pleased our good God will be with you, Sisters, since you'll be doing His holy Will in that, and by serving these little ones you'll be

contributing toward giving Him the most perfect praise, which isn't given Him by theologians but by the voice and actions of these little creatures!

AA fourth motive is that all nations will adore God because these little children have given praise to Jesus Christ. . . . Shouldn't you consider yourselves very fortunate, dear Sisters, to honor Jesus Christ in the person of these little children and to teach them to give glory and adoration to God?

ABut someone might say to me, >How can I look after these dirty, squalling brats, children of wicked mothers who brought them into the world by offending God, and then abandoned them?= Sisters, you'll have a great reward on all these counts. In a certain sense you make amends for the offense those sinful mothers committed by abandoning their children in that way, when you devote yourselves to serving them for the love of God and because they belong to Him. You see, Sisters, if God hadn't called you to this service, if He had left you in the midst of the troubles of the world, you would have been mothers, and your children would have given you far more worries and miseries than these do. And for what? Like most mothers, you=d have loved them with a natural love, as animals love their young. What reward would you have for it? Quite simply, a natural reward: your own satisfaction. This doesn't apply to the service you render to these little ones for the love of God, Sisters, because there's no inducement but that for doing it; they=re dirty, and the very thought of their mothers may be somewhat repugnant to you.

ATrue, Sisters, the work is very difficult, but where is there not some difficulty? It's everywhere. Were you without problems when you were in the world? Wouldn't you have some if you were still there? There are trials and tribulations in every walk of life, but in the case of Sisters who are serving little children--as in every other act of charity--the difficulty is followed by such a great reward that the trouble involved should be greatly loved. In the world, you would have been mothers, but not like you are now, for these little ones belong so entirely to God that we may call them His children, since no one else fulfills the duties of father to them. Understand this truth clearly, dear Sisters.

AI'm sure you'll have great consolation in serving them when you think of the perfect praise given to God from their mouths. The prophets state that God is glorified by little children. Why? Because they=re grateful for the special care He takes in looking after them. Sisters, since from all eternity Our Lord had you in mind to serve these little children, who glorify Him, this is a great honor for you, and you must, therefore, consider yourselves very fortunate. Yes indeed, Sisters! you must attach great importance to God's plan for you. He has chosen you--you who weren't thinking of Him. He allowed quite a few years to pass, during which many children died and, instead of turning to so many people whom His Goodness might have chosen for this holy work, He waited until you were in a position where He could use you for it. How grateful you should be for this grace, Sisters!

AWhat else? When He chose you there were plenty of people in the world and yet He picked you--Anne, Marie, Marguerite, and all the rest of you--leaving aside many other young women in your own towns and families! How indebted you are to God, and how ungrateful you=d be if you weren't most thankful for these graces and didn't do what God asks of you in regard to these little ones! I hope, Sisters, that you'll never be reproved for that. I ask this of Him with all my heart.

ANow don't say to me, >But, Monsieur, do we have to take such great care of these babies, who have been born of such bad mothers and cause us so much trouble?= Yes, Sisters, I=ve already told you so; it's true that you have to go to a lot of trouble, but this effort is the reason

why God is pleased. He finds it so agreeable that He certainly reveals it to His saints, and His saints glorify Him for it. If these were well-to-do children, Sisters--I mean children of distinguished families--you=d have a great deal of difficulty, perhaps even more than these give you, and for what reward? Very meager salaries; and you=d be considered servants. But what will you receive for having served these babies abandoned by everyone? God, throughout eternity. Is there any comparison, Sisters?

AWhat is your place with these little ones? You are, in a certain sense, their guardian angels. *Et quoi*, Sisters! Would you be averse to being with these poor babies when their guardian angels consider themselves happy to be there constantly? If they see God, it's from that place; if they glorify Him, they do so beside these little ones; if they receive His commands, it's from that same place. They are the ones who lift up to God the glory these little beings give Him by their cries and prattlings, and they consider themselves highly honored to render them those services. Sisters, act in that way because, together with those glorious spirits, you are entrusted with the care of these little ones. If you do so with the same zeal, considering God in them, you'll see that the trouble entailed will be very sweet to you and easy to bear.

AOne means of serving these little children well, Sisters, is indifference, which consists in being prepared to be assigned to this ministry and, in general, to be ready to go wherever obedience will send you. You wouldn't be true Daughters of Charity otherwise. Animals obey humans; is it possible that a Daughter of Charity might refuse to obey God? Sisters, even saddle horses don't refuse to have a saddle put on them, and those who draw carriages never refuse to lead. I=ve never--except on one occasion--seen horses refuse to go where someone was trying to lead them, to the right, to the left, forward, backward. They obey the persons who lead them. And you, Sisters, would you want someone to reproach you with the fact that animals are superior to you in submission and indifference? Sisters, be very careful about that and, for that purpose, often call to mind your good resolutions, reflecting that, when difficulties arise, the only way to overcome yourselves is to see God in these little ones and to think that He's saying to you, >My daughters, the trouble you=re taking with these little creatures is so pleasing to Me that it's tangible, and I consider the service you render them as done to myself.=

AAnother means, Sisters, is the exact observance of the customs practiced in the house. We don't have Regulations for them. If there's something to be corrected, it will be done. But until the Rules have been clearly set forth, be faithful to those observed here, and all will go better.

ASome Sisters will say to me, >I=d gladly do that but it's too hard for me to live with this or that Sister.= That's not how your mothers acted, Sisters, nor is it a good example for the Sisters who will come after you. In former days children showed such respect for their fathers that they wanted to imitate them at the risk of their lives. Why shouldn't we do for eternal things what they did for temporary and passing ones? Holy Scripture relates that the children of Rechab[5] used to say that their fathers never drank wine, nor lived in castles or houses, and, consequently, they never wanted to drink any nor to live anywhere but in tents. And although that was no longer done, and people tried to persuade them to act like others, they would never consent to it because they had so much respect for the example and customs of their fathers, and they would say, >*Quoi*! For three hundred years our fathers refrained from drinking wine and living in houses; God forbid that we should ever act contrary to their custom!= So, they preferred to die rather than to do otherwise than their fathers had done, and this filled God with pleasure. In the same way, Sisters, you should become habituated to the customs observed in the house in order to imitate the first Sisters of the Charity so that those who come after you may imitate you as

their mothers.

AAnother means, dear Sisters, is often to think of the grace God has given you in calling you to serve Him in the person of these little children. Since you have been caring for them, their number has reached twelve hundred or more; they all have received holy Baptism. Had you not taken over the care of them, perhaps they would all have died unbaptized and, consequently, been deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, which is the greatest punishment of the damned. What a happiness for you, Sisters, to be able to contribute to such a great benefit, and how honored you should consider yourselves for having had this grace, along with that other one, namely, that through your care, many of these little ones are still alive! If that continues, there will be at least seven or eight hundred of them within ten years, and those who die baptized will go on to glorify God for all eternity. What a happiness, Sisters! You have a share in the praises they give to God, to whom they portray the charity you had for them and all the trouble they gave you. The charity practiced toward these poor little creatures, to whom you give life--or rather preserve the one God has given them--by the care you take of them is a tremendous aid to your salvation. What a happiness, Sisters! Acknowledge that you=re very unworthy of this grace, and try to make yourselves worthy of it, for fear that God may take it away and give it to others who would make better use of it and be more grateful for His goodness.

AApart from the merit and reward God gives you for serving these little children, a rather powerful motive for serving them conscientiously and assiduously is that sometimes there is satisfaction in it, and I'm convinced that you often have feelings of affection for them. Sisters, you can't have too much affection for them. Rest assured that you don't offend God by loving them too much, since they are His children, and your motive for devoting yourselves to their service is His love. It wouldn't be the same if you had been mothers in the world, for the natural love of mothers for their children is often an occasion of sin; and then they deeply regret and suffer much on that account. But you, Sisters, will be suitable mothers if you see to the needs of these little creatures, instruct them in the knowledge of God, and correct them with fairness accompanied by gentleness. In this way you'll be truly good mothers. And what will be the outcome, Sisters? These babies will grow so accustomed to virtue that they'll be easily inclined to what's good and will manifest the power of God who gathers good fruits from diseased trees.

ASo, dear Sisters, be courageous in bearing the little difficulties to be encountered in this ministry, for I know they exist; above all, however, see to it that, from the moment they begin to stammer, they pronounce the name of God. Teach them to say, >O my God!= Get them to talk frequently of God among themselves; tell them about Him yourselves in simple words adapted to their capacity. Whenever you bring them anything they find good or beautiful, let them know and acknowledge that it's God who has given it to them.

AFinally, Sisters, since it's only the love of God that prompts you to go to so much trouble for them, try to impress strongly on their minds the knowledge of their obligations toward God and a great desire to be saved. The good you do them won't end with their time here because, if they live, they'll go to work in the world; if they marry, they'll give good example to their families and neighbors; if they withdraw from the world, how can they fail, with the good habits acquired from their infancy, to be truly virtuous and to edify others! You'll honor God greatly by doing your duty, but rest assured that God will honor you much more by accepting the services you render Him in these little children, and by giving you a great reward in heaven.

ASo then, make a special effort to accustom them to speak about God. I=ve had a mother tell me, after losing a beloved child who had made good use of the instructions she had given him,

>Ah! Monsieur, when he was little, I stayed for hours at his bedside, waiting until he awoke, to see that the first words he uttered would be AMy God!@ = And do you know why, Sisters? Because when we awaken, the devil tries to put some silly thought into our heads, so that the rest of the day may be the same.

AThe last means that comes to my mind now, dear Sisters, is for you to apply yourselves to reflect on the grandeur of your vocation. It's esteemed most highly by everyone familiar with it; appreciate its true value yourselves. Your vocation, like that of the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu, is one of the greatest I know of in the Church. And God has chosen you, poor ignorant young women, for such a great work. Don't be so amazed at this to the point of feeling proud of it; for, as a rule, God chooses the most uncouth and unsuitable persons to do great things.

AWhen you serve these little children, when you nurse the sick poor, when you seek them out, you render to God the greatest service that can be given Him; you do your utmost so that the death of the Son of God might not be in vain for them; you honor the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who often did the same things as you do and, when you serve the convicts, you honor the sufferings and calumnies the Son of God endured on the Cross. You=d be the most ungrateful persons on earth, Sisters, if you failed to recognize the grace God has given you by such a holy vocation. But beware, I repeat, beware of being unfaithful to it! What a misfortune! As great as the happiness of Sisters who are faithful to it will be, the misery of those who are not will be as great, for it isn't just for someone to receive a reward for work that he or she hasn't done. The example of Judas and of many others should be a powerful motive to incite us to perseverance. Thank God, Sisters, for having been chosen for such a perfect vocation; ask Him to give you all the graces you need to be faithful to Him. I beg Him to do so with all my heart and I ask Him to give you the grace to imitate the Blessed Virgin in the care, attention, and love she had for her Son, so that, like her, as true mothers and virgins at the same time, you may bring up these poor little children in the fear and love of God and that, together with you, they may glorify Him for all eternity. This is the wish I make with all my heart, Sisters, asking God to bless you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

17. - CORDIAL RESPECT

January 1, 1644

On New Year's Day 1644, Most Honored Father did us the charity of giving us a conference on the cordial respect Daughters of Charity should have for one another. After reading the subject for mental prayer on this point, he said to us, ASisters, you should know that you can show one another two sorts of respect. One is solemn and serious; the other is cordial and warm. Solemn respect is often forced; it's the respect of inferiors toward superiors. Sometimes it's shown more through fear than through good will, and in this way it's neither cordial nor genuine. The respect you owe one another, Sisters, must always be accompanied by sincere cordiality, that is, by genuine deference, in the way the angels respect one other. When you meet, you can picture the presence of your Guardian Angels, who, out of respect for God, honor you with their most affectionate care. But, Sisters, just as respect without cordiality isn't true respect, so cordiality without respect wouldn't be genuine but would lead occasionally to taking unseemly liberties and would make this cordiality of little value and subject to change--which will never happen if cordiality is joined to respect, and respect to cordiality. God, by His grace, has endowed many of you with those two virtues, which are the marks of true Daughters of Charity, that is, daughters of God. For this I thank Him. Should there be any who don't honor these virtues, it is to be feared that they may, on the contrary, become daughters of the devil. You

should fear then, Sisters, being deprived of these two virtues; fear that the lack of these virtues may cause people to say that you have the attire of the Daughters of Charity but are not Daughters of Charity. Not that I'm accusing all of you of failing in this, Sisters. I'm well aware that many of you are both cordial and respectful, but this isn't true of everyone. So please fear this and work to make these two beautiful virtues a habit with you.

AThe first point of today's conference concerns the reasons for showing cordial respect to one another. Let's consider the thoughts God has given you on this subject, Sisters. I'm sure that, by bringing them to mind in this way, they'll be very precious to you.

AGo ahead, Sister.@

AI thought we should have cordial respect for all our Sisters for the love of God, and that Superiors in particular have a right to our respect; we should consider them as God upon earth and obey all of them equally.@

AHow about you, Sister?@

AThe first reason is that God has loved us so much and with so cordial a love that He willed to deliver himself up for us, and humbled himself to the point of making himself like a sinner. As for a poor wretched sinner like me, how could I not love my Sisters and not show them honor, since they=re the temples of the Holy Spirit and far more advanced than I in the love of my God?@

ABlessed be God, Sister! Oh yes! The thought of God's love for our Sisters and ourselves is a strong motive for you to have this cordial respect for one another.

AAnd you, Sister?@

AOn the first point I thought that in order to be pleasing to God I must respect my Sisters cordially and look upon them as servants of God and of persons who are poor. I resolved, with the help of His grace, to show them great cordiality by means of the service I can render them. I also thought that, if I preserve this cordial respect, it will be a great blessing for the Community, will edify all of us, and will strengthen us in our vocation.@

AYou=re right to have had this thought, Sister. What a lovely sight it is to see several persons living together in great union! Yes, Sisters, you'll surely be a source of great edification to everyone.

AAnd you, Sister?@

AOn the first point, considering the importance of this cordial respect, I felt that it was the chief means of maintaining good order in a Community; that the early Christians were exact in practicing this virtue, which kept them in a state of great perfection and contentment, and that, when enthusiasm for this virtue lessened, there was unrest among them. The same would happen to us if we were to fail in this cordial respect, whereas, on the contrary, if we practice it reciprocally, as the Son of God recommended to His Apostles, teaching them to love one another as the eternal Father loved them, there will be good order and union.@

AYou see, Sisters, how God instructs you to love one another, since His love for us induced Him to give us His Son. Blessed be God, Sisters, for teaching us himself the way to express this cordial respect to one another, namely, by a strong, courageous love and not by feeble, weak expressions!

ALet's go on. Sister, you who come next, tell us your thought on the subject of your mental prayer.@

AI thought that, in order to show my Sisters the cordial respect I owe them, I will see God in them and count myself as the least of all the Sisters. I'll speak to them with great gentleness and

consider myself fortunate to be the servant of the servants of God.@

AAnd I, Monsieur,@ said another Sister, Athought that one reason prompting us to have this cordial respect for one another is to reflect often that, if we fail to do so, great harm may arise both for the Community in general and for each of us in particular. Another reason is to reflect that their guardian angels are always present. On the second point, I felt that this cordial respect consists in thoughts, words, and deeds, and is sometimes shown by our gestures and facial expressions. We should be careful about this, and I ask all our Sisters to be charitable enough to let me know the failings they=ve noticed in me in this respect. I'm determined, with God's grace, to correct them.@

AAnd you, Sister, who come next, I hope God will bless your thoughts and everyone else's and will make them helpful.@

AA very special reason for this mutual cordial respect is that all my Sisters are spouses of Jesus Christ, and I should always regard myself as the least of all and unworthy of their company.

AOne means to practice this cordial respect is to think frequently of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity who form one sole unity. They practice this cordial respect constantly, as do all the saints, who, although they=ve gone to heaven by various ways, still glorify God as one. I thought that, since we=re all united together for a common purpose, we must achieve it by means of this cordial respect. When I have occasion to call a Sister's attention to some fault, I'll do so with charity; or, if I fear she won't take it well from me, I'll inform our Superiors about it.

AOn the third point, I thought that this cordial respect, united with great gentleness, is the best means to avoid quarrels, to preserve mutual love, and to give good example to the neighbor. I resolved to honor my companions and Superiors by seeing God in them.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AI thought that, when two of us are together, we must bear with one another, dismiss all suspicions, and frequently recall the commandment Jesus Christ has given us to love one another. If we do so with great charity, the whole Company will benefit greatly. As for myself, I=ve done nothing of what I'm saying, and I=ve taken the resolution, with God's grace, to practice this cordiality toward my Sisters better than I=ve done in the past.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! This good Sister has brought up something very important, which would be a great obstacle to cordial respect, namely, the suspicion you might have of one another. Be very alert against this great evil, Sisters! As soon as suspicion enters the mind of anyone whomsoever, good-bye to the deference that engenders respect! Good-bye to union and charity, from which holy cordiality flows! May God preserve you from that!

AAnd you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.@

AI thought, Monsieur, that if we practice cordial respect toward one another, God, who is charity, will be happy because of it and our neighbor will be edified by union among ourselves. The means of leading us to this cordial respect when there are two of us together is great support for one another and a unity that makes it obvious that we have only one will and the same sentiments and that neither of the two thinks herself superior to the other. My resolution has been to regard myself always as the least of all my Sisters and, as such, to show them great respect--more than I=ve done in the past.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AGiven the importance of loving one another cordially, I resolved to have great deference for all my Sisters and to respect them as best I can. For this purpose, I thought it necessary to put a

good interpretation on all their actions and, should there be any difference of opinion among us, to bear it with great charity, with the help of God's grace.

AOn the third point, I thought that, if all of us have this cordial respect for one another, we'll be showered with great graces, and even the Blessed Virgin and the saints will praise God in heaven and rejoice on account of it. That's why I really want to have this cordial respect for all my Sisters. I asked God that it be for His glory and the salvation of my soul.@

AThe first reason why the Sisters of the Charity owe this cordial respect to one another,@ stated another Sister, Ais drawn from the deference the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have for each other, as we see chiefly in two acts: the proposal of the creation of mankind and the Incarnation of the Word. It seemed to me, Monsieur, that, even though we are several persons, this cordial respect will cause us to be of one heart and one will, although, however, there is no comparison. The second reason is that the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph had this cordial respect for Our Lord on earth and in their relationship with one another.

AThis cordial respect is shown when we live together in great peace and gentleness; when we bear with the faults of others, following the example of Our Lord, who put up with the faults of His Apostles and of the people with whom He conversed, and when we try to edify one another by words and actions.

AThe benefit derived from this cordial respect is that God will be glorified by it and union strengthened. God will give us the grace to live in the observance of this virtue, if we speak little and avoid complaining of each other.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AOn the first point I thought that Our Lord himself asks us to respect each other cordially. One means of acquiring this cordiality is to ask it frequently of God, in the way He wants us to have it. Another means is to acquiesce to one another in all that is not contrary to our duties. God's goodness is so great that He'll respond, with an increase of love, to whatever we accomplish by this practice for love of Him.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AMy thought is that the practice of this cordial respect will help us to remain in the presence of God, will preserve such union among us that we'll give our neighbor good example, will prevent us from engaging in worldly conversation, and will make us more attached to our vocation. The best means of putting this respectful cordiality into practice is always to be deferential toward one another. I have determined to be very faithful to it, seeing that I'm the servant of God and of all my Sisters.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! See how much good you should expect from the practice of those two virtues. Yes, Sisters, they really will keep you so closely united that people will be able to say of the Daughters of Charity that they live in a little paradise on earth. If you didn't have them, however, your Company would be a little hell; you=d no longer be Daughters of Charity, that is, daughters of union and daughters of God, but daughters of discord and, consequently, daughters of the devil. Sisters, be very wary of this misfortune! Should some fault against these virtues unfortunately be committed, Sisters--if, for instance, you were to say something disrespectful about a Sister--kneel down at once and ask pardon for it, saying, >Sister, when I said such a thing to you about our Sister, I was being foolish; pay no attention to it because she's a fine person.= If you do that, Sisters, I assure you that in a very short time you'll improve. I'm speaking not only of the Sister who makes this act of humility for the love of God, but of all those who see this example or hear about it.

AThis cordial respect, Sisters, calls for you to greet one another when you meet. And why should you greet one another? Poor village women don't do this. You should greet one another, dear Sisters, because all of you are temples of God. If we pay tribute to material temples and statues made of stone or something else, why shouldn't we greet one another, who are more closely related to God? I make exception of churches because the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there; God himself dwells in them corporally. When you greet one another you also greet your guardian angels, who always adore God. There have been some persons who had such devotion to their guardian angels that they always showed them honor and respect when passing through doors and narrow passages.

ASisters, greet one another wholeheartedly. People no longer regard you merely as country women. Don't ask yourselves, >What will people say?= They'll simply say that you=ve been well taught, and those who notice this action will certainly be edified by it. At Saint-Lazare, it's customary, even among the coadjutor Brothers, to greet one another when they meet, and to hold their hat in their hand when they=re talking to each other. Men have the custom of tipping their hat, and you should replace this act by the usual bow. Please think about this practice, Sisters.@

AFather,@ asked a Sister, Awhen we meet and have to speak to one another, does Your Charity think it proper for us to say, >dear Sister,= to promote this cordial respect?@

AThat practice would doubtless be helpful, Sisters, and I know it's done in some places, but I=d like to think it over before advising you to do so; we'll bring it up again at the next conference. I was just telling you, Sisters, that the practice of this cordial respect at Saint-Lazare was very edifying. I assure you that some people who go there to make a retreat are converted not so much by the meditations as by the example of this cordiality. They say that God is surely in this Company, since there's such great union accompanied by respect in it.

AAnd you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.@

AOne reason for respecting each other cordially, Monsieur, is that we=re all created in the image of God and that, since this cordiality promotes close union, God will shower His graces more abundantly on the Company; if, on the contrary, we=re disunited, the devil will destroy it. We'll practice this cordial respect if we=re very humble and deferential toward one another, interiorly as well as exteriorly; if we love the lowliest duties in the house; and if we consider ourselves unworthy of being in the Company.@

AAnd you, Sister, please go ahead.@

AOne motive to prompt us to practice cordial respect is that God has chosen us and brought us together to render Him the same service; it follows that we must consider ourselves as one body animated by the same spirit--or rather as members of the same body. We'll respect one another if we conceal the faults of others and are deferential to our Sisters.

AAs a second reason, I thought of the Blessed Trinity, which shows us in the unity of its essence the distinction of the three Persons in two instances: in the creation of the world, when they deliberated about creating man in the image and likeness of God, and in the determination regarding the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. By practicing cordial respect, we also honor the relationship of Saint Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, and Jesus. To help us to practice this virtue, we must have a good opinion of our Sisters, paying no attention to their slight failings, recalling that God loves them far more than they love Him, that His Goodness takes neither natural inclinations nor stupidity into account, and that their simplicity even draws His graces more abundantly on them.

AIt's also good to take the resolution often to habitually practice cordial respect for the love

of God, to ask Him for the grace to maintain a lowly opinion of ourselves in our hearts, to speak well of our Sisters on all occasions--with discernment, however, and not in such a way that it may look like we ourselves want to be esteemed--to excuse the faults of others and never to correct them except in a charitable way, from this motive of cordial respect.

ASeveral benefits will follow from this practice: great equality among the Sisters will be obvious; those who are well-born or from the upper class will see that they=re only what they are in the sight of God and that the more they humble themselves before others, the higher God will exalt them. The others, edified by their example, won't elevate themselves above what they really are and will be grateful for the graces God gives them.

AThis practice of cordial respect, in use from the beginning of the Company, will be deeply instilled into it, will become habitual and will endure, and God will be glorified by it. Should it be lacking, disunion and bad example would be the result, and the Sisters might often scandalize the neighbor.@

AWell now, Sisters, may God be blessed for the thoughts His Goodness has given all of you on the practice of cordial respect, and for the resolution all of you seem to have taken to want to practice it! Saint John constantly recommended this virtue in all his preaching, right up to the end of his life. And what did this great saint say, he who was reared in the school of Jesus Christ? Sisters, he kept on repeating, >Children, love one another.= And those who heard him were astonished: >But what does this good man mean? He seems to have nothing else to say to us other than to love one another.=

AI say the very same thing to you, Sisters. It's enough for you to learn this lesson well and to put it into practice. Cordial respect will help you to take in good part whatever your Sisters say to you, for we don't get angry at what's said by a person we love; on the contrary, we gladly accept it, convinced that it wasn't intended to hurt us. That, Sisters, is the mark of true Daughters of Charity, who are daughters of God. Those who don't follow the maxim Saint John taught his disciples are angered by everything, misinterpret everything, and never excuse anything. O Sisters! It's the mark of daughters of the devil always to have the spirit of contradiction, disunion, and animosity, allowing themselves always to be guided by their own maxims and never by the advice of others. Beware of this dangerous habit! The practice of cordiality engenders the respect you owe one another--not as the world manifests it, Sisters, by pretense and outward show, which it will never be, but from a motive of charity and in the way Saint Paul taught us, >Anticipate each other in showing respect.=[1] What a pleasant lesson, Sisters! Anticipate one another in showing respect. So, we mustn't wait for our neighbor to greet us. Being the first to do so is to anticipate the other.

A >But Monsieur,= you will say to me, >shouldn't we greet Sisters who are in a position of authority or are more perfect than ourselves?= My reply, Sisters, is that you should anticipate with respect not only those persons, but everyone else as well. Saint Paul makes no distinction when he says, >Anticipate one another.= The respectful anticipation he recommends isn't based on qualifications or status, but on true charity. Consequently, dear Sisters, it's to you he is addressing this lesson--you who by a very special guidance of God bear this beautiful name of Daughters of Charity, which means daughters who are truly cordial, truly kind, and genuinely sincere. Would it be possible for me to see you in a state of disunion and misunderstanding, lacking respect and deference among yourselves? Fear that, Sisters; I repeat, fear it; it's extremely dangerous.

A >But Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >shouldn't the Sisters who know how to let blood and

dress wounds and are very intelligent lay claim to greater honor and deference than the others?= Sisters, all that is nothing; it can all be lost in an instant. We=ve seen people in the course of an illness forget everything they had previously known. If the respect due to them as Christians had been based on those qualities, then farewell to all the respect people had for them! Oh no! Natural or acquired aptitudes are not a consideration for this great Apostle, but only charity, which gives grace. Charity is kind, it's gentle, it's patient; it bears all things without complaining.[2] Those are the true virtues you should have, Sisters, if you want to correspond faithfully with the grace God has granted you in giving you the name of Daughters of Charity. If you don't have them, what will become of you? So, don't make yourselves unworthy of this name. People in high places who bear noble names are very careful not to detract from their prerogatives.

AA second reason, Sisters, is that by the practice of cordial respect your Company will be a paradise; yes, Sisters, it will be a paradise. What is paradise? It's the dwelling place of God. And where do you think the earthly dwelling place of God is? In hearts filled with charity and in Companies where there is always union. Live in such a way, dear Sisters, that to say >a Sister of the Charity= is to say >paradise,= for where God is, there also is a paradise. If union and true charity are present in the heart of a Daughter of Charity, we may also be sure that God is there. Sisters, Sisters, think carefully about this truth. If you really have this cordial respect, you'll be very good religious women; you'll find your cloister in the good example the others give you. Isn't that true, Sisters? Don't you think that if you live like that, if you never contradict one another, if you have great support for each another, you'll be living like the angels? I assure you, Sisters, that in religious Orders that's all it takes to make perfect nuns. So, please live like that, since you=re bound to do so for many reasons, especially because of all your works. As you=ve seen, you must live within the Company in such union that only charity is apparent. Outside, Sisters, aren't your works those of the angels, those for the service of the sick poor as well as that of the galley convicts, whom you do your best to help to know, love, and serve God? And what do you think it is, Sisters, to be with the little children whom you serve, when all of you are united there in perfect charity? It's a paradise. The host of angels, who watch over their souls, always see the face of God; shouldn't you who assist the children in a similar function consider that you, too, are also living in an earthly paradise? That's why, Sisters, you must work to acquire and preserve this union and cordiality among yourselves. Don't say, like worldly persons who want to be held only to the obligations imposed on them by the rigor of God's justice, >Would I be offending God by doing this or that?= Think instead, Sisters, >If I do the slightest thing contrary to my Rules and to the respectful cordiality I owe my Sisters, I'll displease God.= If you only knew what it means to displease God you=d take great care never to grieve Him! To have received so much from God and to wish to displease Him! What a shame, Sisters! Beware of that.

AJust now I was saying that to live in your Company in union and cordiality is to be in a paradise. I also warn you against the contrary: life in your Company without those virtues would be a little hell. Consider that as certain, Sisters, for the devil, who is a sower of cockle and disunion, would be among you. He=d be among you if, failing in mutual support, you were to say, >That Sister is so bad-tempered!= Sisters, today she has something on her mind or some ailment that makes her a little less approachable than usual; why do you accuse her of being bad-tempered? Maybe you'll be in the same state tomorrow. If you aren't charitable to her today, how can you expect her to be charitable to you tomorrow? If two Sisters live together in these

dispositions, isn't their life a hell, I=d like to know? You see how important it is to practice these two virtues of respect and cordiality. You must frequently ask God for them. He alone can give you this grace, which you need so badly.

ATo obtain it, and to preserve it once you do obtain it, humble yourselves profoundly, have a lowly opinion of yourselves, and wish to be regarded as the last and the least. If you do so, Sisters, in a short time you'll make great headway.

APerhaps, Sisters, some of you may say, >But what will people think of us when they see that we respect one another? We=re known to be country women, and almost all of us are.= Don't let that stop you, Sisters. To whom do you think Saint Paul addressed the words, >Anticipate one another in showing respect=? To all Christians, Sisters. Therefore, you shouldn't be ashamed or sorry if you=re taken for Christians. That's the virtue of Jesus Christ, Sisters; you should do all in your power to acquire it. Where do you think this custom of greeting one another arose? With the early Christians they recognized one another by that sign. Jews don't greet each other.

AWhen you greet one another, is it appropriate to use some term of respect? No, Sisters, greet one another simply when you meet. As I said before, that's what's done at Saint-Lazare, and we=re satisfied with it.

AThis is how we do it: when one of our confreres returns from the country, we each go in turn to welcome him with a cheerful expression, taking great care to bring him what he needs; and if his legs have to be bathed to refresh him, we do it. You can act in a similar fashion, Sisters, welcoming the Sisters with cordial respect, without using affected language, which frequently isn't a sincere sign of genuine friendship. If two Sisters are together and one is the Superior, the other should submit to her guidance in all that concerns the service of the poor and the duty of observance; if, however--God forbid!--the one in charge were to tell the other to do something contrary to the Rules, she mustn't obey her, but inform Superiors instead! If any Sister were to have feelings of suspicion, distrust, or dislike of her Sister, even having an aversion for her and treating her spitefully, squelch such thoughts, Sisters, squelch such thoughts. It's the devil who puts them into your head. Sisters, how far removed these are from the thoughts Daughters of Charity should have of one another!

So, be easy to please, and don't oblige the Sister or Sisters with you to be always on their best behavior and to feel anxious for fear you may take their words or actions the wrong way. That's mainly why, when you approach one another, you should always try to have this cordial respect that you'll show by a bow and a cheerful expression. >But,= you'll say to me, >how can I show this cheerful expression when my heart is very heavy?= I tell you, Sisters, it doesn't matter whether your heart is heavy or not, provided you look cheerful. This isn't being deceitful, for the charity you have for your Sisters is in the will. If you want to please them, that's sufficient reason for putting on a cheerful face. How many things don't people do that are contrary to feelings aroused by natural repugnance! That's the way virtues are acquired, Sisters. If everyone manifested his or her irrational feelings, you=d see some pretty faces! You have to have greater self-control. When you feel inclined to show impatience or disappointment, *mon Dieu*! Sisters, don't do it!

AOur Blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva has given us a wonderful example of this virtue. One evening a high-ranking person called on him and stayed into the night. His servants forgot to bring any candles, as they should have done. What do you think he said to them? He didn't reproach them for their fault, nor did he scold them; he simply said, >Well, boys, we could have used a bit of a candle.= Act like that, Sisters, and don't get into the habit of snapping at one

another. But what am I saying? May such a thing never happen! And don't use unbecoming language, such as, >You=re annoying and obstinate,= or the like. If you happen to fail in this, kneel down at once and ask your Sister's forgiveness without delay. You have to do it, Sisters; in that way you'll obtain many graces from the goodness of God. I ask Him with all my heart to pour forth on your Company the spirit of cordiality and union, by which you'll honor the divine unity in the Trinity of Persons and the cordial respect present in His Son's family during His human life. You'll also enjoy the peace given by His Son after His resurrection, you'll have great union among yourselves, and your work in serving your neighbor will be beneficial for your own perfection and especially for the glory of God. May He bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ABlessed be God!@

18. - EXCESSIVE SELF-LOVE

December 11, 1644

On December 11, 1644, all the Sisters of the Charity assembled by order of Most Honored Father M. Vincent for a conference on the harm caused us when we yield to too much self-indulgence in body and mind. One Sister[1] gave as a motive that the less attention we give to the care of our bodies, the easier it is for us to belong to God.

ABy renouncing this tenderness by which we become too attached to our bodies, making us merely human, we become one same spirit with God, who fills us with His holy love and gives us a healthy disregard for ourselves. I=ve offended God by being too concerned with my food and clothing; I haven't been created to become so absorbed with a matter of so little importance, and every time I=ve let myself give way to it, I=ve acted sensually and with vanity. The surest and best means to correct myself is to rely on my Superiors for all my needs and duties, and to consider Jesus in His crib, helpless in His needs, and Saint John in the desert, who was likewise poorly fed and clothed.@

The Sister who spoke next couldn't find any reason. AI think I=ve offended God,@ she said, Aby too much self-indulgence regarding food and clothing. I should expect everything from my Superiors and not be concerned about anything but doing God's most holy Will. This excessive attention to what I want may lead me to gluttony where food is concerned, and to vanity in regard to clothing.@

AAnd what did you think, Sister?@

AI thought, Father, how very dangerous it is to yield to those tendencies to which nature inclines us. We must rid ourselves of them because they=re a great hindrance to us in the acquisition of perfect love of God, who alone can satisfy us. There's reason to fear that the same thing may happen to us as to the fig tree that didn't bear fruit in season and, on that account, was cursed by Our Lord. We would fall into such a misfortune if God were to drive us from His presence for not having His holy love.

AThe second point of our meditation is on the sins these excessive tendencies lead us to commit. They lead us to spurn the advice of our Superiors, on the pretext that we=re not obliged to follow so many Rules. We make excuses for our laziness by imagining that they=re too hard for us. Laziness causes us to think that we shouldn't have to rise so early. We also sin when, because of this self-indulgence and with no great necessity, we want more than our Sisters have or something other than what they have. This may stem from jealousy.

AI thought, Father, that I should overcome every difficulty courageously and say to myself,

>Why am I here? It's not to give my body pleasure or rest.= And should I be so cowardly as to feel an attachment for any one of those self-gratifications and satisfactions, I should mention it to my Superiors so that, if they judge it fitting, they may send me away from there.@

AThat's well said, Sister! You see, Sisters, there's no better remedy. If you act like that, you'll soon be rid of those petty, annoying tendencies that can be so detrimental to your perfection. Blessed be God, dear Sisters!

AAnd you, Sister, what thought did God give you?@

AOn the first point, Father, I thought that both corporal and spiritual self-indulgence prevent us from having love for God who loves us so much that He left heaven for earth; also that this excessive concern for self prevents us from striving for our own perfection. Next, I asked myself in how many ways this habit might cause us to offend God, and I saw that we sin against the First Commandment of God, which is to love Him above all things, because the pursuit of those satisfactions proceeds only from our self-love. We likewise sin against the Holy Spirit who, in His goodness, gives us so many inspirations. This tendency also interferes with the careful, vigilant attention we owe our sick poor if, on account of this softness, we don't attend to them when we should, putting it off to some other time. It's also a great hindrance to the practice of our Rules; it may cause us to make light of our vocation and prevent us from being gracious and gentle with our Sisters by wanting to get from them what they=re forbidden to give us. One means of ridding myself of this excessive self-indulgence is to think frequently of the austerity of the Son of God and that all the saints have willed to imitate Him.

AI=ve taken the resolution to renounce all those weaknesses to which I=ve been too attached until now and to have those tender feelings only for God, who has so much tenderness for me; I'll offer to Him, in the person of the poor, whom I will serve for His love, the love I desire to have for Him. I am begging His Goodness to give me the grace to do this.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! That's how Daughters of Charity should act.

AGo on, Sister, you who come next.@

AFather, my first reason is that, by working to do away with my self-indulgence I will distance myself from self, and the farther I am from myself, the greater will be my love of God, who is my sovereign good. Another reason is that this self-indulgence might incline me to have something special, which is contrary to my Rule, and in this way I=d be going against God's Will.

AOn the second point, I saw that these dispositions are the cause of many sins because they always incite us to want something special; this makes others envious, keeps us constantly preoccupied with ourselves and prevents us from thinking of God. Furthermore, the satisfactions we seek make us too attached to created things. I took the resolution to pay no attention to these spiritual and corporal indulgences any longer, until I had first seen whether they were not contrary to God's Will; to have no exclusive friendship with any of my Sisters; to have no preference in matters of clothing and food; not to seek any pleasures--for all that is absolutely contrary to the Daughters of Charity--and to rid myself of all indulgence other than that of love of God; for which I am hoping from His grace.@

AGo ahead, Sister.@

AFather, one motive for curing ourselves of being too self-indulgent is that it hinders us from being united to God. When people say to us, >Someone is doing something against you,= we=re so upset by this that we get in a bad mood and become unbearable to our Sisters--and even to ourselves. Another reason is that God has granted me the grace of calling me to the Company,

which I should cherish more than all worldly satisfactions; now, if I have too much tenderness for myself, the observance of my Rules and of what I have been taught is bound to suffer.

ASpiritual weakness sometimes causes us to murmur against our Superiors, especially when, in confession, we=re dissatisfied either with what we=ve said or what we might have wanted the confessor to say to us. From this weakness, petty envy and jealousy often arise against those Sisters whom we think are preferred to us, and we let these feelings show. Likewise, for material things, we watch to see if others are better cared for than ourselves and, if we think so, we complain about them. These feelings are an obstacle to mutual support. That's why, for instance, a Sister who is more refined than the others, on seeing some vulgarity, will ignore it. I have resolved, with the help of God's grace, to strive to rid myself of these weaknesses in order to avoid all those imperfections and sins.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Aone reason for ridding myself of excessive self-indulgence is that the faults I=ve committed have prevented me from practicing the virtues, especially what our Rules recommend. On the second point, I thought that this excessive softness inclines us always to seek our own satisfaction, to be unwilling to suffer anything, and to attach us to created things. As a result, our minds are occupied with other things when we try to pray. I took the resolution to ask God frequently, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, for the grace to be detached from created things so that I may be more closely attached to Him.@

AAnd tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AFather, I think that one reason for detaching myself from my weaknesses is that I=d be more pleasing to God. Maybe that's why He has called me to the Company of the Daughters of Charity and procured for me the happiness of being able to imitate the life of Jesus Christ and that of the Blessed Virgin. Both of them might have lived comfortably in every respect; nevertheless they endured many inconveniences the whole time they were on earth, starting with the day they were born. I also thought that there was no more certain way of going to heaven, since the Apostles and the saints passed through it, and that, to purify our souls, we have to control our bodies. I was really ashamed to see how disinclined I am to practice this virtue. We can sin in this respect by unrestrained indulgence in eating and sleeping, by vanity in our attire--utterly poor as it may seem--and by murmuring against the Sisters who are in charge of the house.

AGreat harm results from these spiritual weaknesses. They lead to exclusive conversations and other similar gratifications, which don't serve to perfect our soul but merely to maintain our self-love. I have determined, with the help of God's grace, to work at ridding myself of this great fault, to regard God alone in all things, and to be closely attached to Him at the thought of Our Lord's suffering during His life and on the Cross, keeping the Blessed Virgin in mind.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AFather, I reflected that, on the day the Son of God left His Father's bosom, He also relinquished all His delights in order to subject himself to pain and sorrow. So, it's very reasonable that I, who have been chosen from all eternity to render Him, in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, services unknown to people, and to work at my perfection, should strive to surmount these weaknesses that are such a great hindrance to me.

AAs for the second point, I felt that I=d be offending God if I desired anything special in my clothing and footwear, and my Sisters would complain of it. I would also be acting contrary to our Rules and to obedience, if I wanted better food than the rest of the community, or complained about being treated other than I would like. As for spiritual self-indulgence, I thought we can offend God by petty envy; if we felt, for instance, that our Superiors took better

care of others than of ourselves, or if I were attached to my confessor, or if I performed any special act of devotion contrary to the Will of God. I took the resolution to watch carefully over myself and not to harbor such thoughts and desires in my heart, but to abandon myself entirely to Divine Providence.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AI thought, Monsieur, that I can have no more powerful means to get rid of my excessive tenderness for self than to be detached from all things and to love the shame that comes to me from my faults. On the second point, I thought that we offend God when we=re anxious about temporal matters and find it repugnant to obey orders that are contrary to our natural inclination. I resolved to rid myself of all the weaknesses that can keep me from being a true Daughter of Charity.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Aone reason to rid myself of those weaknesses is that they make me even more strongly attached to my own will and keep me from doing God's Will. These attachments often prevent us from obeying our Rules and from understanding the happiness that is ours of being called by God to this way of life. I have taken the resolution that, when I am inclined to pamper myself, I will encourage myself for the love of God to do nothing of the sort.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! These are good thoughts. Now tell us yours, Sister.@

AI thought, Father, that it was quite sensible for me to be cured of these weaknesses because they proceed only from my self-love and are an obstacle to the love I should have for my God. They make us impatient with our Sisters and give rise to feelings of vexation and aversion for those who refuse to give us what we want for our own satisfaction. To get rid of them, Monsieur, I thought I should be indifferent to everything, love only the Will of God, and be satisfied with whatever is given me by way of food, clothing, and everything else. May God grant me the grace to carry out perfectly the resolutions His Goodness has given me!@

AOne reason for renouncing our self-indulgence,@ said another Sister, Ais that, when we=re preoccupied with what we desire, we=re diverted from the thought of God, our Creator and benefactor. It also interferes with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, for He is a God of peace and doesn't like our minds to be unsettled. In addition, these weaknesses are displeasing to God, make us fragile, and are the source of many sins. They lead us away from the practice of the Rules and, when we=re dissatisfied with our Superiors, induce us to murmur against them. I resolved to ask this grace from God often, with a great desire for my perfection, and to strive to mortify myself.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AMonsieur, the strongest reason for renouncing my self-indulgence, which frequently prompts me to seek my own satisfaction, is that Our Lord, who had a tender, delicate body, didn't spare himself. His example teaches me not to spare myself--a poor, miserable creature, who am nothing but vice and imperfection--if I want to share in His holy love and the merits of His sufferings so that I may one day enjoy His glory.

AOn the second point, I thought that our spiritual weaknesses cause us to offend God. Dryness and aridity discourage us and lead us to neglect or omit our spiritual exercises. When our Superiors charitably remind us of our faults, we murmur interiorly or show our displeasure, and that's a great evil. One means to rid myself of these weaknesses, when I question whether what I desire is necessary for my perfection, is to put the matter before my Superiors and submit to their decision. Our immoderate self-love causes us to lapse into two sorts of weaknesses

detrimental to our perfection: one spiritual, the other corporal. It's very important for us to rid ourselves of both; when things aren't to our liking they prevent us from acting for the glory of God and His love and from benefiting from the advice of those who can help us to make progress. Moreover, it is to be feared that we might find in those satisfactions the reward of the good we have done, instead of receiving it from God through the liberality of His love.

AThe faults committed by those who allow themselves to give in to such weaknesses are numerous: they look down on and complain about persons who don't suit them, they=re attached to those they like, they don't submit to the guidance of Divine Providence, and they don't accept what comes to them by order of God's Will. Physical self-indulgence lowers us in a certain sense to the level of animals, prompts us to criticize anything that is done contrary to our feelings, and in the end is an obstacle to cordial union. As for myself, owing to my inveterate habit of looking after my own body, I commit many faults, fail to edify my companions, and give bad example to the whole Company.

ATo disentangle myself from these weaknesses, I will, with the help of God's grace, strongly desire to honor the way of life of the Son of God, who, to do the Will of His Father, had no attachment to created things nor to bodily needs, and who sought in all things only the accomplishment of this holy Will, which was the nourishment and law of all His actions. I'll also use the example of the saints and set myself seriously to the task of mortifying my senses and passions. In addition, since I can't live like our Sisters on account of my infirmities, I'll humble myself because of my needs and offer to God all the difficulties that will come to me by His permission, accepting them as acts of divine justice in my regard.@

AI can tell you, Sisters, that of all the topics we might choose, none is more important than this one. God be blessed for having ordained that we=ve shared our thoughts on it! Our blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva had the highest opinion of discussing it; he used to say that those weaknesses and gratifications are nothing but self-love. Now, it's true that our self-love produces those desires in us in two ways: one, corporal; the other, spiritual. The first, as the meditation asserts, has to do with clothing, food, and duties; the second consists in loving our own thoughts and feelings. Now, Sisters, this subject affects in a particular way the Daughters of Charity, whose life should be a total renunciation of self. You must, of necessity, practice this renunciation; aren't you more obliged than anyone else to be faithful to it? Sisters, it must be accepted voluntarily for the love of God.

AThe first reason is that nothing is more strongly recommended in Scripture. Listen to Our Lord: >If anyone wishes to come after me and wants to follow me, he must deny his very self and take up his cross=![2] You see, Sisters, self-renunciation implies the surrender of those tender feelings in us, which are nothing else than an ill-regulated love of self. In another passage Our Lord says, >If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his very self, he cannot be my follower.=[3] And again, >Anyone who does not turn his back on his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, is not worthy of being a child of God;=[4] that is, Sisters, we must turn our backs on them if they prevent us from leaving everything to follow Him, and it's Saint Paul who says so. So, Sisters, you have to die to those sentiments and to those desires to be in the company of such or such a Sister. You see, Sisters, we=re pleased to be on good terms with God, and yet we=d like to live in clover, to be loved and admired, especially by the Officers of the Charity in parishes where we=re serving poor persons, to be called to meetings and to give our opinion there. This leads us to complain when something is done contrary to our wishes because we=re dissatisfied with it, and then we forget ourselves and say, >Why is she in charge? That other

person would be much more suitable.= And the same for the rest of the management of the Charities. What a misfortune if that were to take root in your Company, Sisters! Be on your guard against it, and God grant that it may not happen!

ASo much for the first point, which is to rid yourselves of attachments to the empty satisfaction you may take in what you wear, and the pleasure flesh and blood would like to have in eating. It's Our Lord who is asking this of you by telling you that if you want to follow Him you must renounce yourselves. Would you be willing to refuse Him? Oh no! I'm sure you wouldn=t, Sisters.

AAnother reason is that almost all of you, like the first Sisters, are of humble birth and, consequently, such vain satisfactions aren't natural to you, nor were you accustomed to them in your youth. How fortunate you are--and I along with you--that God has granted us the grace of choosing us from the dregs of the world to make use of us! That being the case, are we to act like we=re knowledgeable persons? Are we to act like we=re better than we really are? If people err by having a higher opinion of us than we deserve, are we to take advantage of that, Sisters? I say further, that even should you be of noble birth, as some of you are, you must never pride yourselves on that, and are just as obligated to rid yourselves of all those weaknesses and vain satisfactions you may have acquired by nature and force of habit. Was not the Son of God greater than you, not only as God's Son but also as man? Was He not of royal lineage? And yet you see His self-abasement, His hard work, and His constant mortification in such great poverty that He had to earn His living along with Saint Joseph. No, Sisters, it would be unreasonable for you to elevate yourselves above what you are. It would be a fine thing to see a young woman accustomed to rustic living, who never had fine food to eat or been used to vanities, arrive in Paris with the apparent desire of serving God and continually doing His holy Will, immediately forget that she comes from parents of modest condition, in whose home she was always fed on a little soup and dairy products--rarely on meat--and try to elevate herself above what she should be. Such conduct would be deplorable, Sisters! Let's take great care not to allow ourselves to be deceived by our sensibilities, which would lead us infallibly to this wretched state of affairs, should we be willing to heed them. Let's be very careful, Sisters! If today we=ve made to God the gift of all that we are by the grace of our vocation, isn't there good reason to be very grateful for it? Do you think you=re the only ones called to practice constant mortification? How many upper-class persons, with the same motivation of the example of Our Lord, forsake everything--parents, property, and every kind of self-gratification! If you only knew how beneficial it is to belong to God in this way, you=d utterly despise the vain satisfactions of the world!

AAnd why do you think that in these latter days God has raised up in the Church a Company that renders Him more important services than any I'm aware of, and whose usefulness is known by God alone? *Quoi*, Sisters! To leave everything with no hope of possessing anything, not knowing what will become of you, and having no other assurance than trust in God--isn't that the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Is there anything greater, anything more noble? I assure you, Sisters, that I often reflect on this, and I can tell you that I see nothing like it. And yet, as great as that is, Our Lord has chosen the humblest means so that His work might be all the more easily recognized and His Father more honored by it. So, Sisters, consider yourselves very fortunate at having been chosen; humble yourselves profoundly for it, and make yourselves faithful to it; for, although you may consider yourselves poor, weak creatures, and perhaps may not realize the grandeur of your vocation, God is aware of it for you. Didn't He will that His Son should seem to be of such humble lineage that, when people saw Him perform works apparently above His

condition, they asked, >Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter?=[5] See how secret God's plans are, Sisters! That's why those of you who come from a higher class have to make an adjustment in your way of life and in the way you dress, and act in all things like peasant girls, in order to follow God's plan in establishing your Community and to see that it subsists; for, without this lowly condition as a foundation, everything would be ruined.

AThese are the two extremes in the Son of God. Is there anything greater than to be the only Son of a God; anything greater, as man, than to be of royal blood, anything more lowly and wretched than His poverty and lifestyle? Humble yourselves as much as you can, Sisters. He invites you to follow and imitate Him and, although you may fall far short in imitating Him, His goodness and love are so great that He wills to be honored by this. How wonderful! Believe, furthermore, Sisters, that as long as you are humble, you'll be safe.

ASince the way of life of the Daughters of Charity is to imitate that of the Son of God, they should have no other practice than penance and mortification. They must, therefore, not allow themselves any physical or mental gratification or vain satisfaction. Your mind will want you to be in this or that parish or with such and such a Sister, or to go to a certain church for some special devotion. These are deceits of the evil spirit, Sisters, although he may suggest beautiful pretexts to you--even in the choice you would like to make of a confessor! Your body will cry out for some petty comforts and dispensations from the Rules--if not in everything, at least in part; it would like to be dressed well and distinctively, albeit rather coarsely, and will indicate that it needs more abundant or better food to preserve its strength. Sisters, beware of all that so as not to be numbered among those of whom Saint Paul says that their god is their belly. That would be to misunderstand God's plan in calling you to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and would not give witness to your desire to honor His holy life on earth. Why do you think He lacked almost everything here below, if not to teach you to practice poverty? What would people say, Sisters, if you liked to eat well? If we were to do so, if we loved vanity (and don't forget that even in our rustic way of life we can have these faults), we would deserve blame and contempt. *Quoi!* Would we depart from the simplicity of our village life? And you who are of more noble birth, would you have given yourselves to God to live this way of life, and then forget yourselves? Let's be very careful, Sisters, not to provoke God.

AThe means of avoiding this danger is to renounce constantly our desires, which prompt us to want this or that. From the day you change your rustic, simple way of life, your poor, shabby clothing, your headdress, and all those practices that encourage you to be humble, you'll begin to forfeit first of all the grace of God, and then the respect people have for you. You=re held in honor now because you seem humble and virtuous in your way of life; the Ladies esteem and love you; many persons are asking to have you. But, Sisters, if you don't have solid virtue and begin to fail in it, you should be afraid. I know that many of you would rather die than be unfaithful to your vocation--but not all. I ask you, with the affection of Jesus Christ, to renew your resolution to persevere in your way of life and your manner of dressing. What would those Ladies, who have so much respect for you and who love and care for you, and those parish priests, who speak so highly of you, what would they think if you were to change, if they saw you putting on airs, or if your vanity and selfishness became apparent to them? They=d change their attitude immediately because all the affection and esteem they show you are due only to the good they perceive in you; and if they were to notice the contrary, Sisters, you=d soon see that their esteem and affection aren't attached to your persons. You=d be held in contempt by them; they=d abandon you and turn to others. A lot they=d care about you! What happened to one of

the Apostles, of whom it was said, >His office of Bishop must be taken from him and given to another=,[6] would happen to you.

AWell then, Sisters, what do we have to do to avoid such a great misfortune befalling us? We must give ourselves entirely to God and ask Him for the grace of self-knowledge. For when we try to raise ourselves up too high, when we seek our own satisfaction, the blindness of self-love prevents us from seeing that what seems good in us isn't from ourselves. To the person who would ask, >Why did you join the Company? Who started you thinking about it?= you couldn't give a straight answer. It's grace and not nature that brought it about in you, for nature holds out as long as it can. No, Sisters, nature doesn't prompt us to abandon all, to leave parents, possessions, and friends to come to a place far from home, among persons whose way of life and temperaments are unknown to us, in order to spend our lives among them. God alone can cause us to leave everything, wretched creatures that we are and the object of His justice, to become the object of His love. O happy exchange! To forsake earthly love for a love that's heavenly, eternal, and totally divine! Let's direct all our affections to that, and renounce all personal satisfaction. We must make up our minds to do that.

A >But, Monsieur,= a Sister might say to me, >that's very difficult. *Quoi!* If I'm living with a bad-tempered Sister, will I have to put up with her? Another Sister may be very unmortified and incapable of enduring anything; do I have to bear with her?= Yes, Sisters, for if you don't bear with that Sister, if you don't put up with that other one, you=re the unmortified one. You'll find it hard for a while, Sisters, but what seems painful to you at one time will be easy at another. Yes, Sisters, you can be sure that a time will come when what displeases you now will give you pleasure, and some Sisters in the Company could assure you that they delight in the difficulties they encounter in living poorly or being poorly attired. The same will hold true for you. All you need is a little courage, and the matter certainly merits it. You Sisters who have already worked hard to acquire it know this. Remember that, to reach your goal, you must detest self; the Son of God asks this of you in order to follow Him.

AThe third means is to pray fervently. If we can't have a good thought without the grace of God, all the more reason for us to believe that we can't acquire this virtue, so necessary for our perfection, without that same grace. The Son of God gives us an example of this when He has recourse to prayer in the necessities of His human life. Whenever you find repugnant the temperament of a Sister assigned to you as a companion, raise your mind to God to ask Him for the support you need. If your self-love causes you to feel some repugnance for this way of living or dressing, call to mind immediately that it's God's Will, since you have been called to the Company, and give yourselves to Him once again to mortify that self-love and to forget yourselves so that He may live in you.

AThe fourth means is to speak with one another about the happiness of souls who have this virtue. Say to one another, >Don't you remember how hard such and such of our late Sisters worked to mortify themselves? How happy they are now! How they are enjoying the reward of their sufferings!= Those, dear Sisters, are the principal means to help us to do away with our offensive self-love, which result in all those weaknesses that cause us so much trouble.

AO Sisters, how happy we'll be if, by these means, we=re able to arrive at the self-contempt that is so necessary for our perfection! Yes, Sisters, I=ve shown you this by the warnings Our Lord gave us when He was on earth. This harmful kind of love causes us to disappoint both God and our neighbor, and puts us in danger of never being able to love Him. If, on the other hand, you have contempt for yourselves, then, instead of a harmful love that will ruin you, you'll

acquire a supernatural love, which is the only true love. Sisters, I know that some of you, by the grace of God, have made progress in this heavenly love, and that almost all of you are striving after it. Be consoled if you don't advance as quickly as you would like. And you Sisters who are brand new to the practice of this skill, take courage, don't be afraid; Our Lord will help you.@

A Sister then acknowledged her failing, saying that her self-indulgence had caused her to fall into many faults, especially against the practice of the Rules. ABlessed be God, Sister!@ said Most Honored Father. AMay His Goodness grant you the grace of accepting this act of penance in satisfaction for the faults you recognize in yourself. Yes, Sisters, acknowledging one's faults in public is an act of penance, and one that may be very pleasing to God. I must tell you, Sisters, something I heard lately about a great Prelate of our day, Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld,[7] who is eighty years of age. He's so exact in his daily routine that he=d be unwilling to fail to observe it, although his age and several other reasons could easily dispense him from it. So, Sisters, when God has called you to a special way of life, don't fail to observe it.

AWell now, Sisters, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came on earth to teach us this detachment from our self-love and to assist us by His example--He who had not a stone upon which to lay His head and all of whose actions were one continual mortification--I ask Him to obtain for us, by His merits, the grace to strip ourselves of any feelings contrary to His holy Will and, in this hope, I pronounce the blessing, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.@

19. - THE VIRTUES OF SISTER JEANNE DALMAGNE

[January 15, 1645]

ADear Sisters, in line with the holy custom of this Company, we=ve come together to speak of the virtues of our Sisters who have died. What a good thing it is, Sisters, to talk about the good actions of the dead! This is what the Holy Spirit desires. That's why, dear Sisters, it will be a consolation for you to tell us what you noticed in this good Sister, as you=ve already done for others.

AWell then, dear Sisters, let's begin. You=ve all made your prayer, as usual, on the three points proposed. Tell us, Sister, what did you remark in our good Sister?@

AMonsieur, she had great charity in her heart, which made her very assiduous in visiting the poor. She used to go to see them after dinner when she had some free time, and took special care to instruct them, always speaking to them with great gentleness.@

AThat's the duty of a true Daughter of Charity, Sisters: to give all her attention to the poor, so that not only their bodies may receive all the assistance you owe them, but their souls may also have the benefit which, by God's permission, they will receive through you.

AAnd you, Sister?@

AI recalled that our dear Sister was very recollected and always walked in the presence of God. She willingly comforted the Sisters she saw who were sad, and encouraged them so gently that their sorrow was eased. She also took great pleasure in speaking about God, especially with poor persons.@

AWhat a beautiful remark, Sisters: >She always walked in the presence of God=! What virtue, Sisters! Always to walk in the presence of God! What a powerful means to advance in perfection! What a powerful aid to serve the poor well!

ATell us, Sister, the thoughts God has given you.@

AMonsieur, we should discuss the virtues of our late Sisters in order to please God, who has promised to be in the midst of us, if we come together in His name. We should also do so

because what is said encourages us to become better and to persevere in our vocation. Among the virtues she practiced, the first that came to my mind was her fidelity to the presence of God. When she met me weighed down, coming back from the city, she used to say to me, >Courage, Sister, let's work for God!= And when I would grow slack, >Sister dear, God is so good!= When she experienced any feelings of joy, I saw that she immediately recollected herself, and these words escaped from her heart, >Dear Sister, ask God to teach me self-contempt.= I also noticed that she didn't talk much and was very reserved and gentle. I took the resolution to make a habit of the practice of the presence of God and to control my passions in order to overcome the first impulse of my impatience.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters, for the graces He has granted this good Sister. Keep it up!

AAnd what did you think, Sister?@

AFather, we share our thoughts on the virtues of our late Sisters to glorify God for the graces His Goodness has granted them and to encourage us to persevere in our vocation. The principal virtues I noted in her during the short time I had the happiness of knowing her were great modesty and reserve and great exactness in following the regulations of the Motherhouse. She loved obedience, seemed to have her mind fixed on God, aspired only to do His most holy Will, and served poor persons with great zeal, gentleness, and charity. She was quite indifferent about whatever might happen to her. I think she had a great love for poverty because she had nothing of her own.

AOne day she told me how she had entered the Company. It was the result of a strong inspiration and a response to the attraction she was feeling during her prayer. She came and presented herself, her soul full of submission to God. >Whether I'm accepted or refused,= she said to herself, >I'll believe it's the Will of God, and I'll be content either way.= And although the good nuns with whom she was living were opposed to her plans, she didn't desist and persevered in her request.

AOh! how many virtues, Sisters! We truly had a great treasure in this Sister. How many graces! Sisters, you=ve certainly suffered a great loss in this Sister; and God forbid that it was the sins of this wretched creature that caused her death! You see, Sisters, you must think of her in heaven as a model you should imitate. Have devotion to her. She sees your tears; yes, Sisters, she sees the tender feelings of your hearts and loves you, much more than she showed while she was among you.

AAnd what do you have to say, Sister?@

AOn the first point, I thought it was fitting for us to share our reflections on the virtues of our Sisters to give glory for them to God and to see the faults that hinder us from acquiring the virtues they practiced. When she was with the Carmelites she couldn't stand it when people spoke of the good she was doing; if they did speak of it, she would weep. At least, I=ve seen her cry once, and I think it was because of her great humility, which couldn't endure praise.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI thought we should speak about our Sisters who have died because knowing their virtues and their zeal for perfection encourages the whole Company to do likewise. I remarked great humility in the deceased. She wanted the Superior to be informed of her faults. When we were together at Saint-Nicolas,[1] she had a great love of God, a great desire for her own perfection, and great concern for the salvation of the souls of the poor persons she helped and served so lovingly. She was indifferent to everything, and ready to be moved from place to place, adoring in everything the guidance of Divine Providence. She was very gentle in conversation, very abstemious at table, and had no attachment to earthly possessions.@

ASisters, there you have the mark of solid perfection: to be exact in obedience, whether Superiors are absent or present. What a beautiful virtue that is and what great detachment from places! That's what a true Daughter of Charity must be like; otherwise, she would often fail.

AAnd what did you think, Sister?@

AMonsieur, we should converse on the virtues of our late Sisters in order to make use of their example by imitating them. I noticed great gentleness and humility in Sister Jeanne. She took great pains to encourage Sisters who came to her. I=ve had a deep desire to imitate her zeal in serving poor persons and to do whatever I may be instructed to do.@

ABlessed be God, Sister, and may He grant you that grace!@

Most of the Sisters repeated the same two motives, namely, that it's good to discuss the virtues of the Sisters who have died so as to glorify God for the graces He gave them, and to encourage one another to imitate them. For that reason, I won't repeat them again.

AAnd you, Sister?@

AThe main virtue I noted in her was true humility. >I don't know why,= she once said to me, >people want to make use of me; I can't do anything well and I=ve been like that all my life.= When she was ill, I asked her to say something edifying and she replied, >To whom are you speaking?= That was two days before her death. My resolution was that, with God's help, I=d imitate her humility, since it's the virtue I need the most.@

AWhat words, dear Sisters! >I can't do anything well!= We have in this Sister a true model of virtues. Let's be very grateful to God for it and ask Him to give us the virtues we=ve seen her practice.

AAnd you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.@

AI remarked, Monsieur, that during her illness our dear Sister was very patient and resigned to God's Will. She said she had no other regret in dying except that she hadn't served the poor well and that, if God restored her to health and life, she=d serve them better than ever. I took the resolution to practice what she recommended to us on the eve of her death. After a weak spell, she made an effort to speak, and, looking at all of us, said that we were very fortunate to have been called to the service of the poor and that they should be served better than she had done.@

AO Sisters, that good Sister really knew how to esteem her vocation as should be done. My heart is filled with consolation on hearing of her virtues.

ASister, you who come next, go on.@

AI remarked in our deceased Sister that her conversation was always good and most often was about the lives of the Saints, and also that when she saw any of our Sisters troubled in spirit, she did her best to console them. When she was thanked for this, she would say that it didn't come from her but from God. Very often she would tell me how important it was to give good example to others. She had great contempt for herself and often raised her mind to God. I took the resolution to imitate her in this virtue of the practice of the presence of God.@

AAnd what about you, Sister?@

AI know nothing of our Sister's life, since I didn't have the happiness of meeting her until she was ill. What I did notice during that short time gives me reason to think that she was virtuous all her life, for she was very resigned to the Will of God in her sufferings and never stopped making interior acts of the love of God. She often declared that she aspired to nothing but her dear Spouse. I want to acquire the habit of making similar acts frequently, so as to arrive at the point I think she reached. A year before she died, she was seriously ill in Nanteuil. She told the

Sister who was sent to her from Paris[2] how sorry she was for not having served the poor with the zeal and detachment a Daughter of Charity should have, and her distress at her lack of humility. She often showed us that her mind was in the presence of God. One day she said very affectionately to me, >Dear Sister, love your vocation fervently and serve the poor with great humility.= My resolution is to strive to acquire her virtues, especially her fidelity to the holy inspirations God will be pleased to grant me, and also her detachment and indifference.@

AMonsieur,@ said another Sister, AI noted her constancy in wanting to become a Daughter of Charity. Although several very virtuous persons were opposed to her plan, she would always say that she wanted to die serving the poor. She resisted courageously all those who promised to provide most advantageously for her during her lifetime, as well as the nuns where she was the extern Sister, who suggested admitting her into their monastery, and the Princess[3] who offered to allow her to select even the convent and the Order she would like. We learned this from one of the extern Sisters of the same convent. She was pressured so much that she gave in for a while. However, she was overcome with sadness, prayer became difficult for her, and her infirmities increased. From this she saw that God wanted her to serve persons who were poor, and she renewed her efforts. Although the devil used some worldly tactics to thwart her plans, she was accepted into the Daughters of Charity. She lived among us, as we=ve seen, in the observance of her Rules.@

AO Sisters, how many graces and what fortitude in a poor, simple girl! I'm filled with respect for so many virtues. Go on, Sister.@

AOne day, when I was accompanying her into town, she said, >Sister, try to remember clearly the good examples and instructions given us at the Motherhouse. They should be a big help to us when we=re far away from it.= Afterward I thought that she was trying to teach me not only to remember them, but also to put them into practice.@

AMonsieur,@ said another Sister, AI noted that she had such a dread of the sin of presumption that several times during her illness, when people tried to console her by saying that her sufferings would serve her as a purgatory, she showed that she didn't agree with them. She lived in great union with all the Sisters and wanted everyone to have this union. One day, when a Sister seemed a little apathetic, she said to us, >Truly love one another, Sisters, and you'll always get along well together.= She was very zealous regarding obedience and, in order to practice it better, would have wanted to live always at the Motherhouse. At the time of her last journey to Nanteuil, she said to us, >Alas, Sisters! I'm really afraid that I'm going back again to do my own will. Please pray that it may not be so!= She had great respect for persons who were poor, which showed us that she saw God in them.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AIn the eighteen months I lived with her, I didn't remark the slightest imperfection.@

AHow marvelous that is, Sisters! Blessed be God! In eighteen months not a single imperfection was noticed in a Sister; that's something I=ve never yet heard said of anyone. Really and truly, Sisters, we have great reason to thank God for having given us such an example of virtue. Take care, Sisters, please tell me--tell me quite frankly--what faults you noticed in her.@

And M. Vincent paused, leaving everyone time to reflect. Finally, a Sister spoke up and said that what might be a virtue in someone else was the only thing blameworthy in her, and that was her immoderate desire to serve God and to devote herself to prayer.

AIsn't that beautiful, Sisters? Has anyone ever heard something like that of a holy soul? A while ago we were speaking of a Sister who was highly respected and who had some excellent qualities, but it was pointed out that God had tested her by a few minor failings and by some passions not yet mortified. But none of these has been noted in our dear Sister. Well now, *O Dieu!* what a blessing! We have great reason to thank God for giving the Company such a treasure. I'll tell you, Sisters, that I don't remember ever meeting her without feeling edified.@

AFather,@ remarked another Sister, Ashe had great compassion for poor persons. When she couldn't do anything to help them physically, she would console them, weep with them, encourage them to bear with their poverty and sickness, and teach them how to make good use of these things. Even during her illness, she spoke to them with such fervor that it didn't seem as if she was in pain. It seemed to us that everything she did and said was always in and for God. This caused me to reflect that, to be true Daughters of Charity, we must be totally detached from the world in order to be more closely united to God. She spoke with great prudence and was very courteous and gracious with her neighbor. Even when something annoyed her, she acquiesced with great gentleness, if she could do so without offending God. When anyone said something to her that showed her in an unfavorable light, she didn't get angry about it, but kept a smile on her face, put the best interpretation on everything, and sought every opportunity to humble herself. When the doctors told her she wouldn't recover, she showed no sign of distress.@

Another Sister mentioned that the conference we have on our Sisters who have died manifests the goodness of Divine Providence which, by its hidden guidance, uses such powerful means to produce such wonderful results in creatures so poor and wretched as we are, and makes us ashamed at the sight of our negligence in adopting the means to become virtuous like our dear Sisters. She often practiced humility in my regard. When she thought I was annoyed at something, she knelt at my feet. And since I was unable to speak because of the shame and embarrassment I felt, she remained in that position until I showed her that I was no longer displeased. She never went to bed with any feeling of antipathy in her heart, or even if she suspected that someone had hard feelings against her. Several times she came and knelt at the foot of our beds to ask pardon with deep humility; afterward, she told me that we should never go to bed if we were at variance with our neighbor and if we could be reconciled.

AShe had very great charity for her neighbor and especially for poor persons, regardless of their situation. She would spare nothing to help them in every way she could and judged to be necessary, both for their souls and for their bodies. Her total concern was to see how to bring them some relief, such as finding remedies for their illnesses. She served them with great gentleness. For patients who were incurable, she would miraculously heal them of their injuries and various wounds. And yet she had no experience, for very often she didn't know where to begin nor what she should do; so she would then turn to God, and would say afterward, >Ah! what a good teacher God is!=

AShe didn't shrink from the offensive odors that came from the patients. In Nanteuil there was a poor girl eaten away by scrofula and abandoned by everyone because of the stench caused by her disease. Her mother couldn't even earn her living because of the fears people felt on account of her daughter. Our Sister provided for their needs with great care. Twice a day she went to clean and dress the sick girl's sores, despite being ill herself. The foul odor sickened her very much and added to her own weakness. When I was told of her condition and chided her for what she was doing, she told me that her weakness was due to her own lack of courage, and that, since she was unable to render great services to God, the least she could do was to exert herself

in the little opportunities she had to serve the bashful poor.[4] Often, before dawn, when those poor persons were not even out of bed, she was at their door with some alms, at a time they least expected; and she did all that very discreetly.

AIf she heard of anyone's misconduct, she would look for an opportunity to speak with them, and her advice was frequently followed. If the persons so warned promised to amend and failed to keep their promise, they did it on the quiet, so she wouldn't know about it. Every evening without fail she visited the poor vagrants who stayed at the hospital, where the Daughters of Charity also lived. She instructed them as best she could, especially on the principal mysteries of our faith. If she came across a poor person who needed bread, and couldn't otherwise provide him with it, she would come and ask me to help him with his supper, so as not to do anything contrary to the will of her Superiors. And when I said to her, >Here's some stale bread, Sister; you can give it to him,= she replied, >Oh, no, Sister, I'll eat that myself; we should give God only good things.= She took great care to visit the poor elderly people, consoling them and exhorting them to receive the Sacraments. One day she succeeded in persuading an old woman, greatly in need of the Sacraments, to go to confession and receive Holy Communion; the woman died the following day. This led us to believe that it was a special grace of Providence for that poor soul.

AHer charity wasn't limited to Nanteuil; with the permission of Superiors, she extended it to the neighboring villages. Sometimes she=d go there, greatly fatigued by her own illness. One day a poor young woman had to have a bloodletting in her foot; she did her this service and, half an hour later, the girl had to be given Extreme Unction. People thought that our dear Sister had caused her death, and the rumor spread everywhere, both in Nanteuil and elsewhere. When she saw that I was pained by it, she told me that things would turn out as God wished, and urged me to pray with her. Shortly afterward the girl recovered and came to thank us for the help she had received. From this I saw how resigned our dear Sister was to God's Will in accepting this blame if the girl had died.

AShe was very cordial and patient. When she noticed that I was in a bad mood, she treated me with great gentleness, using little devices and amusements to distract me; she even set aside her own will and feelings to satisfy me. I sometimes shared the state of my soul with her; she would encourage me and say she was worse than I. When she saw that I was unusually upset but wasn't telling her why, she prayed for me. Very often I felt the effects of her prayers, especially on one Pentecost Sunday. Since I couldn't bring myself to go to confession, in view of the great fear I had of doing so, I was very sad and downcast all day long. The following day I felt relieved of all my scruples in an instant, and confessed with great ease. When she saw how happy I was--the reason for which I couldn't reveal to her--she said, >Blessed be God that the Divine Goodness has so willingly heard our prayers!= I=ve felt the power of her prayers on several other occasions as well.

AShe had great liberty of spirit regarding whatever concerned the glory of God, and, whenever she noticed anything blameworthy, would speak as frankly to rich persons as to persons who were poor. One day, hearing that certain rich people had evaded their taxes, with the result that the poor were overburdened, she told them outright that it was contrary to justice and that God would punish them for such extortion. And when I remarked to her that she had spoken out very boldly, she answered that, when there was question of God's glory and the welfare of poor persons, we must never be afraid to speak the truth. During her long illness she never complained except when she was dying, and never omitted any of her spiritual exercises, so much so that sometimes I had to forbid her to carry out her desires and to order her to take a

little rest because she was so weak. She was very faithful to mental prayer, which she made twice a day no matter how busy she was, without neglecting any of her duties, and she told me that it was in prayer that she found her strength.

AShe always seemed very recollected, especially on Communion days. On those days, almost immediately after her return home, she=d go off by herself for a quarter of an hour, in addition to the time she spent in Church making her thanksgiving. She gave such good example that if she was with anyone, whether at home or elsewhere, she never left without giving some edification. She had a great love of God, longing for nothing but God and for opportunities to do good for love of Him. She had such great contempt for herself that she wanted to reveal her faults to everyone. Whenever I was coming to Paris, she begged me to inform our Superiors of them. Often she would ask me to admonish her in order to help her to correct her faults, requesting that I do this service as a token of my affection.@

AO Sisters,@ exclaimed Most Honored Father, Adoesn't it make you very happy to hear this account of the graces God granted to our dear Sister? You should be very grateful that the Divine Goodness gave her to your Company. As for myself, I must confess that I'm filled with grief and admiration: grief for the loss the Company has suffered, and admiration when I see such a gifted Sister serve as an example for all of you and for those who will come after you. What a faith-filled Sister! You see, Sisters, the grace that was in this soul was extended even to you by the effects of what it accomplished in her. I assure you, Sisters, that I often felt a certain reverence at the sight of her--not because of my own virtue, poor wretch that I am, but God sometimes allows predestined souls to act like musk, which can't be in a place without filling it with its pleasant fragrance.

AWhen a Sister at Saint-Germain-en-Laye[5] received news of our dear Sister's death, she sent the following message to the Sisters of the Motherhouse: >We=ve lost a great example. I hope our good God will cause the virtues she practiced to be made manifest on earth for His glory and our encouragement.=

AThe lady for whom she was working eight or ten years ago told me that even then she was very assiduous in her prayers; they would come upon her unexpectedly praying everywhere: in the stables, in the cellar, as well as in her room. She rose very early to go to Holy Mass for fear that something might prevent her from going. When her mistress found out, she gave her permission to go every day. On days of obligation she kept a strict fast, and during one entire Lent she had only one meal a day, and very little at that. Her snack and anything else she might have eaten went to poor persons. She was a maid in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where the Court was in residence, and although several persons were living in her master's home, that did not interfere with her devotions. When she would hear the footmen and other valets swearing, she would reprove them, and she taught catechism to those who needed it. People remarked that the persons she rebuked were ashamed of themselves and withdrew from her presence--a good indication that God was pleased with the service she rendered Him in that area.

ASince it almost always happens that persons in society want to make money on everything, her master and mistress, whether to try her or for some other reason, sometimes ordered her to remove large pieces of wood from the bundles they were selling. >If you think you=re going to lose money,= she would tell them, >sell them at a higher price; but I'm not going to remove any of the wood from them.= Although very obedient in everything, she wouldn't have done anything that might have offended God.

AShe was very charitable, and even at that time she loved the poor. Everything that was given

to her went to them. When her mistress reprimanded her for this, she replied, >Oh! I'm not giving it away, I'm just investing it; it will be paid me back a hundredfold.= @

When M. Vincent questioned another Sister, she said, AMonsieur, God wants us to share our thoughts on the virtues of our late Sisters since Our Lord permitted the disciples of Saint John the Baptist to report to him what they had seen of His works, and this was to affirm them in their belief of his teachings to them regarding the Messiah. Our Lord gives us another motive for conversing about our deceased Sisters in His many teachings during His life, but especially when He forbade His Apostles, at the Transfiguration, to relate what they had seen before He died; this leads us to think that He permitted it after His death.@

Another Sister stated that she admired Sister Jeanne's fidelity in responding to the first call of God, who destined her for the service of poor persons long before she knew of the Company of the Daughters of Charity--a clear indication that God wanted her in that vocation. At that time she was working as a maid in Saint-Germain. She learned by chance that the Carmelites were in need of an extern Sister, so off she went. The Carmelites made enquiries of her mistress who deeply regretted her departure. The information they obtained led them to appreciate Sister Jeanne far more. They accepted her, but it wasn't for long. Shortly afterward she decided to become a Daughter of Charity. The entreaties of human beings were unable to shake her. What a great lesson to teach us how to do God's most holy Will! Since she didn't have sufficient arguments to convince the Carmelites, nor enough strength to endure all the difficulties by herself, she left the decision to Dom Morice, a Barnabite religious. After questioning her and duly considering the way God was leading her, he advised her to give herself to the service of the poor in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, whom he knew only from what she told him about them. He was convinced that it was God's Will.

AShe was always very exact in practicing our little Regulations and, although she had a great attraction for prayer, she never let the poor suffer on that account but served them without ever leaving that state of recollection that was almost constant with her. She willingly left prayer when the Will of God called for it, well aware that she wasn't leaving Him by going to the poor for love of Him. She was very detached from everything, even from devotional objects. All she had was a rosary, her little book, and a surgical kit, and none of those things of which young women are fond. And although she was loved in the places where she resided, and might have had excellent reasons for remaining there, she made it known that she needed to leave, and came joyfully to the Motherhouse saying, >I'll learn not to do my own will any longer.=

AOne evening, thinking that she was close to death, she begged the Sister with her to tell her imperfections to all the Sisters after her death in order to make known her ingratitude and to teach them by her example not to act as she had done. Then, making an effort to speak, she said, >Sisters, if I feel any regret it's for not having served the poor well. Please serve them well. You=re so fortunate to have been called by God to this vocation!=

ASince it was very difficult for her to speak, we hardly ever came to see her that she didn't indicate with her eyes or some facial expression that her mind was always occupied with God. When she saw some young Sisters at her bedside, it seemed like she wanted to encourage them to persevere. Even though she was unable to say that to them, she made it clear.

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, Athe last time I heard her confession (I can tell you this for your edification and without breaking the seal of confession), she felt that she should accuse herself of the satisfaction she experienced in her sufferings. >Tell me, Sister= I asked her, >in whom do you place your hope?= And she answered >In God alone.=

AI=ve read many lives of the saints, Sisters, and I assure you that few saints surpass our Sister in love of God and of the neighbor. *Mon Dieu,* Sisters! Could we possibly have such an example under our eyes and remain in our bad habits? To have seen the way she devoted herself to the observance of the Rules, and to continue to fail in them? Sisters, learn well the lesson taught by this dear Sister. It should serve as an encouragement to you. Reflect often that you=ve been so fortunate as to have had in your Company a Sister in whom you don't remember seeing any imperfection. Even little children have their faults and, as a rule, God permits that there remain in most Sisters, for their entire lives, some form of passion, in order to try their virtue. In this Sister we haven't remarked any. Once again, Sisters, let's be very grateful for this grace. Often people are at a loss to find something good to say about the words and actions of those who have died but, in the case of our Sister, we=re all so filled with the good that was apparent in her that, if we were to examine minutely everything she did during her lifetime, we=d have a hard time finding any fault in it. Blessed be God, Sisters!

AShe was very detached. One day when someone asked her if she wanted to see her sister who was in that town, she said, >Let the dead bury the dead.= The same question was asked of her regarding Dom Morice, who had been her Director before she entered the Company; she replied that she had to ask her Superior's permission. The confessor she had before joining the Carmelites declared that she kept a close watch over the purity of her soul.

AShe was very indifferent as to whether she lived or died. Convinced that this illness would terminate in her death, she would sometimes say, >I'm going; oh! I'm going.= >Well then, Sister,= I=d tell her, >go happily to your Spouse who is calling you.= At these words her expression showed that she was greatly consoled. Often she would kiss her crucifix. After several attacks from which she thought she couldn't recover, she asked the person whom she considered her Superioress,[6] >Will I be here much longer?= The Superioress said she didn't think so, but that she had to remain submissive to God's Will to the end. She showed that she was ready for that but was very much afraid that she might become impatient because of her intense suffering. She seldom complained, and when she did, it was a weak, gentle moaning.

AAfter her death, they opened her up, and it was found that her lungs were pushed up almost against her throat, indicating a severe disturbance of the internal organs. Apparently, she suffered more than do those who die of lung disease. God wanted to lead her to greater perfection.

ABlessed be God, Sisters, for having willed that all the thoughts, words, and works of our Sister should give us reason to glorify Him on earth and to be edified by them! It's really amazing that we can say that we didn't note any blameworthy imperfection in her, although it's written that the just man falls seven times a day.[7] You can say of her, Sisters, that she was a perfect model in your Company, and this should give you good reason to acknowledge what a great happiness it is to be a Daughter of Charity--I mean a good, true Daughter of Charity such as she was. The last time I saw her, when she was scarcely able to speak any longer, I said to her, >Well, Sister, tell me now which would you have preferred to be during your life: a great lady or a Daughter of Charity?= >A Daughter of Charity,= replied this good Sister. What a beautiful reply, which shows us, Sisters, that the state of a Daughter of Charity is greater than all the grandeurs of the world! And who can doubt it, since to be a Daughter of Charity is to be a daughter of God? Who wouldn't prefer this title, Sisters, to that of the daughter of a king? So, Sisters, don't go to any more trouble looking for someone in heaven to help you acquire the virtues of a true Daughter of Charity, since we can believe that she's there. Yes, you=re allowed to believe it, for she lived the life and died the death of the just. Each of you may invoke her in

private. This is a great loss for your Company, Sisters. God grant that my unworthiness has not been the cause of it!

AWhat a great motive for gratitude, Sisters, when we see that God has given so perfect a subject to your Company! May God draw from this the glory His Goodness wants us to render Him! He has allowed us the consolation of seeing her die among us, and the desire she had to do so shows clearly how detached she was from all things, with no other wish than that of doing His holy Will in the state of life to which His Goodness had called her.

ASisters, I consider you fortunate to have had this good Sister in your Company. Blessed are you, my God, for the graces you bestowed on her and for the knowledge you are giving us of her virtues, especially of her readiness to accept death, if God so willed it, and to endure the blame she would have had to suffer if that good young woman whom she bled had died!

AI beg God with all my heart to give you a share in her virtues, to grant you the grace to imitate her detachment in all things, to love the practice of your Rules, to condescend to your Sisters in whatever does not offend God, and to esteem and love your vocation, so that you'll always be faithful to it. I offer you this prayer, my God, asking you to bless all our Sisters in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.@[8]

She lingered a long time between life and death. We were told she wanted to see M. Vincent, but he couldn't go to her because of important business. Since people were saying that she was so low that there was little hope of her recovery, Sister Elisabeth, one of the oldest Sisters of the house, was sent to visit her. As soon as the patient saw her, it seemed that God gave her renewed strength. AI'll leave with you,@ she said, and continued to improve to such an extent that the doctor gave the assurance that she could travel. The parish priest of Nanteuil and the other administrators of the hospital, even though they really wanted to keep her with them permanently, consented to gratify her wishes at the expense of the Hôtel-Dieu, and procured a litter to transport her to us. This gave her great consolation, although she was in a very pitiful state and unable to travel without danger of dying. Nevertheless, God allowed her to make the trip very successfully, aided by our good Sister. Her arrival was a consolation to everyone, but especially to herself, and she would often say, >How happy I am to be here! My God, let me die whenever you wish!=

AGreat benefits ensued for us; for, since, out of submission to Divine Providence, we had remained indifferent as to whether she=d come to us or remain where she was, I think God in His goodness willed to let us see that He was pleased with this disposition by rewarding us for it, even in this world, as He did, when, even though we didn't request it, an autopsy was performed on her after she died.

ABut what I appreciate the most is that, two or three days before she died, Most Honored Father came to see her one evening at her urgent request. When His Charity saw that we were afraid she=d die during the night, he and M. Portail said all the prayers for a departing soul, in the presence of all the Sisters who were in the house at the time. Afterward, the senior Sister[9] who was there asked his blessing for the whole Company, both present and absent, that God might be pleased to grant all of them, at the hour of death, the grace the Church had just asked for the soul of this dear Sister. His Charity consented most willingly and said the words of blessing from his lips as well as from his heart.

AOn the eve of her death, she asked again several times to see this dear Father, and in her bouts of anguish and weariness she kept turning toward Saint-Lazare[10] to show us how much she wanted this. God willed to grant her this consolation. When M. Vincent drew near to her bed,

she manifested great joy, and the person[11] who knew her state of mind said to him, >Father, our Sister wishes to have the honor of seeing you so that she can put her soul entirely in your hands. She very humbly begs Your Charity to offer it to God in the way you know will be pleasing to Him, so that the instant it leaves her body it may be united with that of Jesus Christ, in order, by this means, to obtain mercy.= >My very dear Sister,= he said, >I promise most willingly to offer your soul frequently to God in the way you wish. I entreat the Divine Goodness to grant this grace to you and to all Daughters of Charity now and for the future.=

AEveryone was so pleased at the thought that they would benefit at the hour of death from the power of this prayer and blessing, that I wanted to write it out in its entirety so that from it the poor Daughters of Charity may know the care Divine Providence takes of their Company and may always be very grateful for it.

AI don't want to omit the fact that when one of our Sisters met Dom Morice, who was Sister Jeanne Dalmagne's confessor before she entered the Company, and told him of her death, recommending her to his prayers, Dom Morice replied, AI don't think she needs prayers, but rather she's the one who'll be praying for all of us.@[12]

20. - OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE

January 22, 1645

On the feast of the martyr Saint Vincent, in the year 1645, Most Honored Father did us the charity of holding a conference on the Rules and practices of our Company. ASisters,@ he said, Ayou know the subject of this conference. I have to remind you of what has been the practice in your Company for a very long time. It's not a question of new Rules but simply of your usual practices. It's getting late, Sisters; I=ve kept you waiting a long time, and I ask your pardon for having done so. I assure you, however, that I had my cloak on and was ready to come, when a person of rank made me go back.

The three points of your prayer were: the motives for practicing exactly the traditional customs of the Company; the faults that are--or may be--most commonly committed against the longstanding customs and Rules of the Company; and the means to be used in order to keep your Rules more exactly in the future. Well then, I don't think we need to spend too much time on this topic. Let's just consider some of your notes.

ASister, what were your thoughts on this subject?@

AThe first reason, Father, is that we can't be virtuous if we don't practice our Rules; the second is that, without this practice, there can be no union in the Company. I recognized that I was committing many faults against the Rules. I=ve failed in almost all of them, especially in mental prayer. I haven't had good, holy thoughts throughout the day and, through false politeness and human respect, I haven't gone to bed at the proper time, even though my conscience reproached me. By so doing, I gave bad example to the Sister who was with me, and by many other faults against the Rules as well. I thought that, in order to practice my Rules better, I must renounce myself because I always feel a natural repugnance when I have to overcome myself in something. I=ve resolved to work at this, with the help of God's grace.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AFather, I thought that since God has called me into the Company of the Daughters of Charity I must follow their Rules, obey our Superiors, and give good example to my Sisters in all my actions. The faults I=ve particularly noticed in myself are failures in silence, and my harsh words and improper conversation by which I=ve often failed to edify the Company, as well as by many

other faults that we wouldn't want to commit in presence of our Superiors. I resolved, with the help of God's grace, to put into practice the Rules Divine Providence has given us and to obey my Superiors and all our Sisters. May God grant me the grace to do so!@

AAnd your thoughts, Sister?@

AThe first reason, Monsieur, is that, since God has taken me into His service, He expects great perfection of me. The second is that God is so good that He well merits our doing violence to ourselves. Furthermore, He will demand a strict account of all the graces He has given us. The faults I commit against the Rules are caused by my excessive self-indulgence, and my laxity has often been the cause of my negligence in serving the poor. I thought that, as means of practicing our Rules better, I should renounce myself, will only what God wills, and obey our Superiors exactly.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AWe must be exact in the practice of our Rules because by this means God will grant us the grace of perseverance in our vocation. Every time we fail in the practice of our Rules we act contrary to the fidelity we owe to God. This separates us from Him, and it has made me feel very ashamed because I=ve almost always failed to practice all of them. If I am to correct my faults, it's important that I love my vocation more, with the help of God's grace and the assistance of the Blessed Virgin and my Guardian Angel.@

AAnd what about you, Sister?@

AIt seemed to me, Father, that Rules are given to Companies to help them to improve. A second reason is what Our Lord has promised to those who keep the evangelical counsels and to those who perform the works of mercy. These promises are addressed especially to Sisters who have the happiness of being called to Companies established for the exercise of charity. All the articles of our Rules are directed to this, especially instruction of the ignorant and visits to the sick and to prisoners like the galley convicts. A third reason is that by the exact observance of the Rules in all things, without ever straying too far from what is laid down for us, we edify one another. A Sister who refuses to say, do, or accept what she has been instructed to do may draw others into that same spirit of rebellion and disobedience. I=ve been so contemptible as to have failed much and frequently in our way of life, especially by not asking pardon of my Sisters each time I=ve annoyed them; consequently I=ve given bad example to all my Sisters, of whom I very humbly ask pardon with all my heart.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! And you, Sister?@

AIt seemed to me, Monsieur, that the only means of helping us to please God and to do His most holy Will is the observance of our Rules, which are given to us by order of Divine Providence. I=ve often failed to practice them by my failures in silence and obedience, and by my great aversion to being reminded of my faults. To practice them better in the future I will often ask God for the grace to do so and will reflect just as often on my duties. Praised be the Holy Name of God!@

ABlessed be God, Sisters! Sister, you who come next, please continue.@

AAt the beginning of my prayer, Father, I admired the means God uses to let us know what is most pleasing to Him and what He is asking of us to increase His glory in us. Since in His chief dwelling place there are rules, observed very exactly by the nine choirs of angels, there must also be some on earth in the Companies in which He is pleased to reside, especially in the ones that aspire to imitate the life of Jesus Christ, such as the Company of the Daughters of Charity. It's only reasonable that all of them in general and each one in particular should be very careful to

observe in their entirety the Rules that have been given them and to work hard at them as a means of perfection. I admit that up to the present I=ve often failed in the practice of almost all our Rules, especially in the deference I owe to all my Sisters. To put them into practice better in the future, I thought I should be very detached from myself in order to become deeply attached to God's Will, which I find in our Rules, since they=ve been given to us by our Superiors. My resolution is to be more zealous than ever in the practice of the Rules. May it please God to grant me the grace for this!@

AI can't be a good Daughter of Charity,@ said another Sister, Awithout putting into practice the Rules of the Company, in which I have almost always failed since the time God gave me the grace to belong to it. In order not to fall into these faults again, I need to overcome myself.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

AFather, I thought that, by observing the Rules, we honor truth and shun hypocrisy, since our Superiors, outsiders, and our Sisters believe that we=ve given ourselves to the Company to do everything that's done in it. Another reason is that God wills it; He manifested that to us when He called us to this way of life. It's good to recall frequently that it's God whom we are serving, that He sees us surmounting for love of Him the minor difficulties we have in it, that He knows we=re grateful for it and that, for a little work, He'll reward us in the end with a happy eternity. Faults against our Rules gradually diminish our fervor, put us in danger of losing our vocation, give bad example to our Sisters and, what is worse, sadden God.@

ABlessed be God, Sisters, for the esteem you have for the little Regulations observed in your Company for so long! God desires that order be kept in all things; Saint Paul teaches us that when he says that what is ordered comes from God.

AIt may be said in truth that it's God who established your Company. I was thinking about this again today and I said to myself, >Did you ever dream of founding a Company of Sisters? Oh no, not I! Was it Mlle Le Gras? Just as little.= I can tell you in all truth that I never thought of it. Who then had the idea of establishing in the Church of God a Company of women and Daughters of Charity wearing ordinary attire? That wouldn't have seemed possible. Yes, I did think about the ones [the Charities] in the parishes, but I can tell you once again that it was God, and not I.

AI, though unworthy, was Pastor of a small parish.[1] As I was about to give the sermon, someone came to tell me there was an indigent man who was sick and very badly lodged in a poor barn. I was informed of his illness and poverty in such terms that, moved by compassion, I made a strong plea, speaking with such feeling that all the ladies were touched by it. More than fifty of them set out from the town, and I did the same. When I visited him, I found him in such a state that I judged it wise to hear his confession. As I was taking the Blessed Sacrament to him, I met the ladies returning in droves, and God gave me this thought: >Couldn't these good ladies be brought together and encouraged to give themselves to God to serve the sick poor?= As a follow-up, I pointed out to them that these great needs could very easily be alleviated. They immediately resolved to see to it. Afterward, the Charity was established in Paris to do here what all of you can see. And all the good began with that. I hadn't given it a thought. God is the one who willed it, Sisters, and Saint Augustine asserts that, when things happen in that way, God is their author. In this city of Paris a few ladies had a similar desire to help the poor in their own parishes, but when it came to carrying out the project, they were greatly hindered in rendering them the lowly, difficult services. During the missions I met a good country woman,[2] who had given herself to God to teach girls here and there. God inspired her with the thought of coming to see me, and I

suggested the service of the poor to her. Immediately she gladly accepted, and I sent her to Saint-Sauveur, the first parish in Paris in which the Charity was established. A Charity was next set up in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, then at Saint-Benoît, where there were some good country women. God blessed them so much that, from that time on, they began to meet and come together almost imperceptibly.

AYou see from this, my very dear Sisters, that truly the reason given by Saint Augustine for knowing if a work is from God is clearly manifest in your Company, with the result that, if anyone were to ask us how it came about, we can truthfully say, >I don't know.=

ASo then, dear Sisters, since the plan to bring you together is from God himself, you must also believe that it was by the guidance of Divine Providence that, with time, your way of life was formulated in a set of Rules, and that it's necessary to put those Rules in writing to preserve the memory of what God asks of you and to maintain in their observance those who will come after you.

AThe second reason is that, as long as you=re united and bound together by the exact practice of your Rules, you'll be living in the manner Our Lord asks of you and will be regarded as a little army ready to fight the enemies who might try to break up your ranks; in this way you'll appear before heaven and earth as daughters of God. Sisters, you have great reason to humble yourselves because of the plans God seems to have for you. If you only knew. . . . Shall I say it, Sisters? I'm hesitating as to whether I should say it or not, for fear that someone may become proud. I'm torn because it might also encourage you. Blessed be God, my very dear Sisters! It's for His glory. A few days ago I was speaking about you to a great servant of God, Sisters; he told me with great feeling that he saw nothing more useful in the Church. Do you know what has earned you such a reputation in the eyes of the world? It's the practice of your Rules. And what can maintain you in it? The very same practice--that and nothing else. So, Sisters, stand fast and don't fail in even one article of them; that is, don't grow lax.

AHave you ever heard what sailors do, who navigate the high seas, sometimes more than five hundred leagues from port, without seeing land? Mariners feel safe as long as they are exact in following the rules of navigation; if they fail to put the helm down hard when the pilot advises it, or if the sails jam, the ship is inevitably lost. The same is true of Communities, Sisters, especially of yours. Like a ship on a storm-tossed sea, you=re exposed to many and varied dangers! Your vocation is your navigation, and your Rules are your guarantee of safety.

AYou have, then, embarked on the ship to which God has guided you by His inspiration. You need a pilot who keeps watch while you sleep. And who are these pilots? They=re your Superiors. They=re responsible for telling you what to do in order to reach port safely. You'll make port if you=re very exact in the observance of your Rules. If anyone among you wanted to dispense herself from them and asked her companion not to tell on her, Sisters, don't trust that Sister. How can we expect the pilot to steer us, if she's not aware of the rocks and shoals? Sisters, don't trust those who don't want their words or actions to be reported to their Superiors; mistrust yourselves if you have such thoughts. And why, Sisters, should you fear to disclose your weaknesses? Don't you realize that Superiors have the hearts of fathers and know well how to treat the weak as weak and the strong as strong? But the strong shouldn't wish to be treated like the weak; great harm would result for the Company from that. To avoid that danger, Sisters, let me say that it's better to overcome yourselves by a little courage than to allow yourselves to be demoralized by too much laziness and self-indulgence. Here's an example that may perhaps be of use to you. Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, who is over eighty years of age, has for many years

never failed to rise at four o=clock in the morning, and I don't think he goes to bed before ten. The Chief Justice[3] does likewise, although frequently he doesn't get to bed before eleven.

AIt's very important, Sisters, that you remain steadfast in the practice of your original customs if you want God to continue to bestow His graces on you, without which you'll never do any good. This exactness alone can obtain your perseverance from His Goodness and cause you to be a source of edification to the world. Good Mme Goussault died desiring this; yes, Sisters, she died thinking of you. She died in the evening, but on the morning of that same day she said to me, >Monsieur, all night long I was thinking about our good Sisters! If you only knew how highly I esteem them. How many things God has revealed to me about them!= Think about this good lady; God gave her so much good will for you. To encourage you still more by her example and to strengthen you in the observance of your Rules, I can tell you that, long before her death, she prescribed certain regulations for herself, and she was very exact in keeping them. She had made it a habit to keep silence while dressing and didn't fail in this. In order not to be distracted by persons who might enter her room, she had a chapter from a devotional book read aloud to her during that time.

ASisters, if a woman living in the world is so exact in regard to something to which she isn't bound, for even greater reason, Sisters, should you not fail to observe all your customs, which you resolved to do when you entered the Company. Although until now you have not had your Rules in writing, nevertheless the custom of the first Sisters obliges you to follow them since you have formed an association with them and you owe them your example; the elder Sisters also owe you this example of exactitude. So then, Sisters, put yourselves out a little and don't think that the slightest difficulty dispenses you from your exercises.

AWell, Sisters, it's time for you to leave. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought you together to follow the example of His holy life, to give you His Spirit to practice your Rules, and to grant you the grace to imitate Him in His humility, simplicity, and gentleness so that you may edify one another and be in the good graces of everyone, according to God's plan. May He bless you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

@HEAD40 = *Thoughts of Saint Louise on the Conference of January 22, 1645*

The Company has long desired and requested that its way of life be set down in the form of Regulations so that, by reading them, we may be encouraged to practice them. God, who has today given us this grace, asks of us greater fidelity and exactitude than ever.

By the order God has established in heaven and in nature, at all times and in all places where His mercy reigns, He makes us understand that He also wills this in Companies to avoid the condemnation of the only place where there is no order, i.e., hell and its appurtenances. The third reason is that our salvation may perhaps depend on the observance of these Regulations. We are in the Company by the guidance of Divine Providence, and it is through Providence that God's graces must pass to reach us. Those who lived on earth in Our Lord's time took up their position in the places through which He was to pass, and it was there that some received the grace of their calling, and others that of being healed. In a way, then, it would show a certain contempt for God's graces were we to stray from the path on which He has placed us.

I acknowledge that I'm guilty of all the faults of the Company because I fail in almost every respect and don't correct others when I should, sometimes out of cowardice and a desire to please. To follow my own inclination, I=ve kept the Company too long at recreation, from which has arisen the bad habit of wasting time--not that we were idle, but the topics of conversation weren't related to the exact observance God asks of the Daughters of Charity, as, for instance,

instructions on how to tend and serve the sick poor.

The principal failings in the Regulations are the lack of respect of the Sisters under the Sister named Servant of the Poor, and the lack of forbearance of the Sisters named Servants of the Poor toward their companions, with whom they are too authoritative in giving orders; the misconduct of Sisters who agree to do or say something contrary to the Rule and promise each other to conceal it; and the laxity and laziness of those who, in order to be dispensed from the observance of the Rules, declare that they=re not obliged to do so.

One means to practice our Rules better is to ask God's grace for that purpose, and to ask my spiritual father how I can bring into harmony with these Rules my bodily infirmities and the few business affairs I have. I must also be more attentive to what our Sisters in the house are doing, and those outside as well; more exact in finding out about their behavior, and doing all I can to teach them about our way of life and what God is asking of us. May He be forever blessed!

21. - OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE

Continuation of the Conference of January 22, 1645[1]

AMy very dear Sisters, at the last conference you brought your notes on discussions to be held on the necessity of Rules in Companies. Good things were said that consoled me greatly, Sisters. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired you to say them. Blessed be God!

AI think we stopped on the question of whether it's advisable to dispense with the Rule for the service of the poor. Sisters, the service of the poor must be preferred to everything else. You may even omit hearing Mass on Holy Days, but only in case of great necessity, such as if a patient were in danger of death and needed the sacraments or medicine, or would be in grave danger without you. When you exempt yourselves from some exercise prescribed by your Rules, it must be done with discernment and not to gratify yourself. If you arrange your time in such a way as not to waste any of it, both for visiting your patients and for getting orders from the Ladies and presenting them with the necessary accounts, you'll see, Sisters, that most often you'll have time for everything. When you don=t, set aside whatever is less important. In this way you=re sure to be faithful to your Rules, and even more, since obedience is regarded by God as better than sacrifice. It's God, Sisters, whom you want to serve. Do you think God is less reasonable than the masters of this world? If the master says to his valet, >Do this,= and if, before his order is carried out, he asks him to do something else, he doesn't find fault with the valet for setting aside what he had been told to do in the first place; on the contrary, he's more pleased. The same holds true of God. He has called you to a Company for the service of the poor; and to make your service pleasing to Him He has given you Rules. If, when you=re observing them, He wants you elsewhere, fine, Sisters, go there with no doubt that it's the Will of God.@

A Sister said that she often missed prayer at five o=clock, and asked if that was a breach of Rule. ASister, if you miss it for the reasons I=ve just mentioned, you=re not breaking your Rules. In such a case, try to recall that your Sisters are beginning their prayers, and offer them to God; you'll have a share in them. Offer Him also what you=re going to be doing at that time, which will be entirely consecrated to God; by this means, Sisters, you'll all be united. Perhaps you'll tell me that you have so many things to think about that even when you=re praying you can't spend a quarter of an hour without being distracted. Don't be surprised at that; the greatest servants of God occasionally have these same difficulties. A few days ago I was speaking to a good priest, converted a few years ago, who spends a great deal of time in prayer. He told me that frequently he had neither any taste for it, nor satisfaction in it, except to say, >My God, I'm

here in your presence to do your most holy Will. It's enough that You see me.= You should do the same.@

A Sister pointed out the difficulty arising from the fact that neither she nor her companion knew how to read. AIt's true, Sister,@ replied M. Vincent, Athat this is a little difficult. One time we spoke at some length on this subject and suggested making use of pictures of the life of Our Lord. That was done for a time but, apparently it doesn't work, since the practice has been abandoned. There's another very simple means, and that is to take the Passion of Our Lord as the subject of your prayer. There isn't one of you who doesn't know all that took place during it, either from having heard it preached or from having meditated on it. The Passion of Our Lord is such an excellent means of meditation, Sisters! It's a fountain of youth in which you'll find something fresh every day. Saint Francis never had any other subject for mental prayer than Our Lord's Passion, and he recommended to all his dear spiritual children to make use of it constantly. And from what source, Sisters, do you think great Saint Bonaventure drew all his knowledge? From the sacred book of the Cross. You'll do well to accustom yourselves to this. I advise you to do so; then you won't miss making your meditation for want of a reader.

ASisters, it's important for all the Sisters to be exact to this practice of mental prayer, as well as to all the other observances of your Rule in order to be united, so that at the time the Sisters are praying at the Motherhouse, those at Saint-Paul, Saint-Jacques, Saint-Jean, Sedan, Angers, and everywhere else are also praying. Many graces and blessings will flow to your Little Company from this. If, of necessity, a Sister should be detained with a patient or elsewhere through charity or obedience, she could, nevertheless, be united in spirit and will with her Sisters. As long as you act like this, Sisters, you will be sure that God is pleased with you.

AThis uniformity is so pleasing to Him that He has commanded it for the welfare and guidance of the universal Church. Go throughout Christendom; you'll always find Mass celebrated in the same way, with the same words, and the same *Pater Noster.* Go to the Levant, to far-off lands, or to the Antipodes; the prayers are always the same, and it's by this means in particular that real Christians are recognized. If this is true of Holy Church, it isn't surprising that all Companies act in the same manner. Go into all the houses of the Capuchins, and you'll see that they pray the Divine Office everywhere in the same way. The same can be said of the other Orders. If you didn't imitate them, there would be reason to fear that irregularities would soon bring about the ruin of your Company. Pay close attention to this, Sisters; it would be a great misfortune both for you and for those whom God might call to His service through your good example, if you didn't do so. May God, in His goodness, preserve you from causing such a great loss to our poor, dear masters! Not that God wouldn't raise up in your place better servants for them. Have no doubt about that, Sisters, but what would you not lose for all eternity! Blessed be God that all of you seem to want to be faithful to Him and are grateful for the graces He bestowed on you by calling you to His holy service!

AI was deeply consoled at the last conference to hear one of our Sisters say that, when she fell asleep with a good thought, it preserved her heart from bad ones. Going to sleep like that is a good habit, Sisters. Recently I was speaking to Mme de Liancourt.[2] She told me that a gentleman named M. de Chaudebonne had adopted the devout custom of always sleeping with his hands joined. God rewarded him for that by the grace of dying while at prayer. It's very important, Sisters, to acquire good habits. You should also have great respect for your regular observance of the grand silence from after night prayers until after prayers the next morning. Don't speak to any Sister without necessity, for fear that you may be interrupting the conversation of her soul

with God. That time is totally consecrated to Him, Sisters; Our Lord has said so: >I will lead my spouse into silence and there I will speak to her heart.=[3] Just see the harm you would do to one another, were you to interrupt such sacred conversation. I told you on another occasion that Mme Goussault was very exact about keeping silence. If a lady of rank, who had so much to do and had no obligation to observe silence, was so exact, how much more careful should you be, Sisters, to observe your practices faithfully, since you gave yourself to God to do so, and because God has subjected you to Rules that oblige you to it!

AYour Rule prescribes, Sisters, that you study at the appointed times how to read and write. I=d like all of you to acquire this knowledge, Sisters--not to be learned, for that often only puffs up the heart and fills the mind with pride, but so that it might help you to serve God better. Do you think, Sisters, that those who teach or study philosophy are better Christians because of that? No, that's not why you should study, but so that you may be able to write out your receipts and expenses, send news about yourselves to distant places, and teach poor little village girls. I'm convinced that knowledge is of little use and that a theologian, no matter how learned he may be, finds that his knowledge is no help to him in making his prayer. It's more common for God to communicate himself to simple, ignorant persons of good will rather than to the more learned; we have many examples of that.

ADevotion and spiritual inspirations and acts of love are given more frequently to truly devout girls and women than to men, with the exception of those who are simple and humble. Among us, the Brothers sometimes give a better account of their prayer and have more beautiful thoughts than we priests have. And why is that, Sisters? Because God promised it and is pleased to converse with the lowly. So, those of you who can't read should be consoled and reflect that this can't hinder you from loving God, nor even from making your prayer well. If a Sister had such great difficulty in making her prayer that she became completely helpless, she could ask permission to say the rosary. And, in accordance with the advice given her, she'll make use of this beautiful devotion.

AOur blessed Father used to say that, if he were not obliged to say his Office, he wouldn't say any other prayer but the rosary. He strongly recommended it, and he himself prayed it without fail for thirty years to obtain purity from God through the purity He gave His holy Mother and in order to die well. So then, Sisters, the recitation of the rosary is a very beautiful devotion, especially for Daughters of Charity, who have such great need of God's assistance to obtain this purity, which is so necessary for them. Blessed are the souls who give themselves to the service of God for the sake of purity! You have great reason to glorify God, Sisters, for the grace He has until now given your little Company for this virtue. The Sisters who have already died let us see that clearly enough. The purity of their lives has greatly edified us. In due time, we'll speak of the latest Sister to have died. May God be eternally blessed! That's why, Sisters, I exhort you always to have great devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

AAnother of your maxims is not to waste time. What an excellent and necessary piece of advice! People used to ask Saint Anthony in his day how to be saved, and his reply was always, >Keep busy.= He showed this by his own example because, apart from his prayer time, he did manual labor. I recommend that to you, Sisters. When you come home from visiting your patients and have nothing to do, take your distaff or something else and set to work; in this way, Sisters, you'll edify your young Sisters, and they'll do the same after you. You should also strive as far as possible to be uniform in all things because, Sisters, if any of you were to love to be different she=d no longer be a Daughter of Charity but a daughter of pride. May God protect you

from that, Sisters!

AYour way of life also prescribes that you make a short annual retreat, that is, the spiritual exercises, and you do that, Sisters, in order to recognize your failures of the past year and to rise from them more courageously. Those eight days of silence are a harvest time. What a happiness if you use well that time God gives you to speak with Him heart to heart! It is then that Our Lord's promise to lead your soul into solitude is fulfilled. That's why I beg you, Sisters, not to fail to make it. You'll learn there to be true Daughters of Charity; you'll also learn there how to serve the sick well. You'll go over in your mind the actions of Our Lord when He was on earth, you'll see that He spent a good part of His time serving His neighbor, and you'll take the resolution to imitate Him. What do you think Our Lord did? He wasn't satisfied with restoring the sick to health; He also taught them how to act when they were well. Imitate Him.@

ABut, Monsieur,@ a Sister then objected, Ashould we who are so ignorant instruct others?@

AHave you any doubt about that, Sisters? Don't be afraid to ask God for the right thing to say to them; He won't fail to inspire you. Is there anything more beautiful? How touching to see that, not satisfied with the trouble you=re taking, you have on your lips words that testify that your heart is filled with the love of God and that you want to communicate this to our masters, His dear poor persons! Yes, Sisters, do all you can for that purpose; give yourselves to God to serve Him in this way, and don't ever be with a poor person again without giving him or her some instruction.

AYou should also, Sisters, show great respect for the orders given you by the physicians for the treatment of your patients, and take care not to omit even one of them for the times as well as the dosage of the medicines, for sometimes it's a question of life and death. Carefully observe the way the physicians treat the sick in the towns--where there are some--so that when you go into the villages, you can make use of this knowledge: when you should bleed a patient, how often you should repeat bloodletting, the amount of blood you should draw each time, when to take it from the foot, when to use cupping glasses, when to give medicines and which ones are suited to the various kinds of illnesses you may encounter. All that is very necessary, and you'll do much good when you=ve been trained in everything. It's good for you to have brief discussions on this subject.@ A Sister then said that this was sometimes done by way of question and answer.

AYou should present yourselves to the Directress[4] at least once a month to give an account of your conduct. What a holy custom of your Company that is, Sisters! Don't fail in it. But let your communication be sincere and cordial. Speak at that time not only about your failings, but also of the good you are doing by the grace of God, and do so in order to purify it. If you omit making your communication to her, you place yourselves in danger of being tempted because you see, Sisters, God tells the just man to do well the good he does. It isn't enough to bring food and medicine to the sick, nor even to instruct them, if you don't unite to it the virtue God asks of you and the intention He wants you to have in those good works. Communication with your Directress will be a great help in both these matters because God blesses the submission and humility that prompts you to speak to her for love of Him. When you go to visit a sick person, do so in union with Our Lord and to imitate Him. In this way, Sisters, you'll merit far more than by performing great acts of penance. It's the intention that counts. An action of little value is elevated by a good, upright intention and becomes great in the sight of God. If you can't make one for each of your actions, at least renew your intentions from time to time.

AYou also have the custom of never going out without permission. When you=re out, be very

careful never to go anywhere other than the place for which you have permission. As soon as you return, don't fail to present yourself to the Directress, or the person who represents her, to give her an account of what you did when you were out.

AAs long as you remain within the enclosure of obedience, which is your cloister, you'll be safe, Sisters; if you go beyond it, be afraid from then on and believe that you=re in danger.@

A Sister then asked if it was a good thing for her to ask a Sister to reprove her for her faults. After reflecting on the matter as usual, M. Vincent replied, ASisters, when you see that a Sister has no objection to your admonishing her, do her the charity of reminding her with meekness and cordiality; but if you see that she's disheartened, and doesn't take it well, don't reprove her. Your willingness to help her in her need can still be yours in not saddening her. A Sister who isn't docile and objects to being reminded of her faults should have great reason for fear and self-distrust. That's why I ask you, Sisters, to give yourselves to God to accept the admonitions given you, no matter from whom they may come; otherwise, it's to be supposed that there's some hidden pride or natural aversion and repugnance in our character. And why should you be annoyed that someone reproves you, Sisters? Saint Peter was willing for Saint Paul to correct him, although he knew quite well that Our Lord had made him the head of His Church. Act the same way, Sisters; when a Sister is willing that you correct her, do her that charity. The Bishop of Geneva recommended that so strongly to his dear Sisters of the Visitation, not only to accept admonitions willingly, but also to manifest joy at being reproved! He went even further, for he advised the Sister, after thanking the person who gave the admonition, to accuse herself of a fault that had not been noticed; for instance, a Sister reprimanded for showing irreverence by remaining apart from the others in church should reply, >Thank you, Sister; God allowed you to notice this fault, but if you had seen my soul, you=d know that it was far worse, because my mind was wandering.= I assure you, Sisters, that if you act like that, you'll make great progress.

ASisters, I ask Our Lord, the author of every Rule, to grant you the grace to observe very exactly those Rules it has pleased the Divine Goodness to give you for your way of life, so that, keeping yourself in their observance as on a ship, you may arrive safely in heaven, where you'll receive the reward of your labors. And for that purpose, I ask God to give you His holy blessing, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.@

22. - RECONCILIATION

[Between 1634 and 1646][1]

A . . . Try to excuse one another, saying, >Surely what that good Sister said to me wasn't intentional; I know she was taken by surprise,= and not, >She's bad-tempered; no one can get along with her. One thing I'll never do is to obey her; she's a conceited person.= Oh no, dear Sisters! if you can't accept a rebuff, there's reason to think that you=re not acting for love of God. Reflect, rather, that this person, whom you find so difficult to get along with, may one day be far above you in heaven and that she's the image of God; in addition, dear Sisters, honor the forbearance the Son of God has had for His creatures who are so far beneath Him. Isn't it true, Sisters, that you=ve really failed in mutual support and, for want of it, have often become angry?@ All the Sisters recognized and admitted this fault. AWell then, dear Sisters, don't you promise from now on to correct yourselves, with the help of God's grace?@ They all manifested their desire to do so.

AThe reconciliation you=ve promised to make when you=ve had the misfortune of being angry with one another is a great means of improving. It's something that's very necessary, and Our Lord himself ordered it, saying, >The sun must not go down on your wrath,=[2] and, >If your

gift is on the altar and you recall having had an argument with your neighbor, go first to be reconciled with your neighbor before offering it.=[3] So you see, Sisters, if you=re on bad terms with your neighbor, God can't be pleased with anything you do. So, as soon as you see that you=ve displeased one of your Sisters, throw yourself at her feet and ask her pardon, saying, >Please forgive me, dear Sister; I let myself get carried away by my feelings and am so unfortunate as to have annoyed you.= That's what I do, dear Sisters. If I thought I had displeased anyone, I couldn't go on without being reconciled.@

One Sister pointed out that they made reconciliation two or three times a week. AThat's excellent,@ he replied, Abut it would be better to do it at the time the fault is committed. Don't you think, dear Sisters, that union is essential for persons who bring it about among strangers, and that those who have the honor of bearing this beautiful title of Daughters of Charity, which means Daughters of God--God in them and they in God--shouldn't remain a single moment in a state of discord, which removes them from their center, who is God?@

M. Vincent was asked what should be done when a Sister was unwilling to accept the humiliation of her Sister, replying instead with a contemptuous remark or refusing to listen to her. ASisters,@ he replied, Aif--God forbid!--such a thing should happen, then, Sisters, the one who has been spurned should pity her Sister, pray for her, not be disheartened, and embrace her once again; for you see, dear Sisters, she may have no sooner walked away from you when she will regret what she has done. Her fault is serious--greater than the fault that annoyed her--because she has drawn away from God and saddened the heart of her Sister. Has this happened, dear Sisters?@ Several Sisters acknowledged this fault and promised, with the help of God's grace, not to fall into it again.

AAnd how do you remind someone of her faults, dear Sisters? Isn't it sometimes done in the heat of passion, abruptly and rudely? You really have to watch out for that, Sisters, because, when we admonish our neighbor, our intention is to help her. Let's correct others for the love of God, which wouldn't be the case if we were prompted by passion. Correction, dear Sisters, shouldn't be given for trifles, for then it would never stop. The forbearance we owe one another should prevent us from dwelling on the matter. Give your reproof, not in the presence of another, but privately, saying, for instance, >Sister, please don't be annoyed with me for reminding you of such and such a matter. I'm wretched enough to do far worse myself, so I entreat you to have the charity to let me know when I fail.= These admonitions should be given for faults committed against the Rule, when these faults are followed by bad example, and you should be faithful to this because we=re so responsible for one another's souls that one day God will ask us to render an account of them. It's this practice that led the Church to give people a godfather and godmother at holy Baptism.

AA few days ago I was deeply edified. A man came to our house and asked us to give a mission in a village in which he had a godson. >Monsieur,= he said to me, >I'm asking this only for the salvation of the soul of my godson in the hope that, by this means, God will touch his heart and change it.= Isn't it true, dear Sisters, that you=ve neglected this practice, so important for the salvation of your souls? Everyone present acknowledged this truth and admitted that often they had reproved others through hastiness and the habit of wanting to correct, rather than from pure love of God. They determined, with the help of His grace, to be careful about this from now on.

AMy very dear Sisters, when you want to remind a companion of some fault, I beg you, for the love of God, to commend to God what you have to say and, if the matter warrants it, make

your prayer on it. God will bless the advice you give in this way, and your Sister will benefit by it.

AAnother matter of great importance, dear Sisters, is the way newcomers should act toward the senior Sisters, and vice versa. Those who have recently arrived should honor the childhood of Our Lord by being respectful toward the older Sisters, have a high regard for them, since they were called by God before them to His service and that of their neighbor, and be very deferential toward them, humbly accepting their advice. Although the Son of God was more learned in everything than Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, and all honor was due to Him, He was still subject to them and didn't fail to do the lowliest tasks in the home, and it's said of Him that He grew in wisdom and age. May this example be a powerful motive, Sisters, to make you gentle, humble, and submissive, and not to murmur when a Sister reminds you of some fault!@

23. - HOLY COMMUNION

January 22, 1646

The first point concerns the reasons we have to dispose ourselves to make good Communions; the second, the means of preparing well for them; and the third, the signs by which we may know if we=re making them well. The Sisters who were present included not only those living in the city, but also seven or eight from the villages, whom Divine Providence apparently inspired to come, without being notified, to hear the charitable counsels of our dear, good Father on this important topic.

After His Charity had read the aforesaid points, he turned to a Sister and said, AWhat did you think on the first point, Sister? Why should you prepare yourself to make your Communions well?@

The good Sister, who wasn't one of the most intelligent, said that making a good Communion was a great benefit, and we could know that we had done so when we felt happy about it. And our very dear Father, who wouldn't embarrass anyone, added with his usual charity, AYou see, Sisters, what our Sister means is that, when we=ve received Communion, and our conscience doesn't reproach us for any attachment to sin or any desire to conceal a sin in confession, that's a sign that our Communion was well made. That may well be a sign, Sisters, but it's not always a sure one, for there are souls hardened in sin who never feel any remorse. May God preserve you from such a misfortune! If that were to happen, dear Sisters, what should you do? You should be very contrite, resolve to make amends for this fault, and prepare well for your next Communion.

AAnd you, Sister, please tell us the reasons we should have to prepare well for Holy Communion.@

AMonsieur, besides committing a sacrilege by making a bad Communion, I think we receive Our Lord to our own condemnation. One of the signs that we haven't made a good Communion is that we don't correct our imperfections. One means of making a good Communion is to be very exact in preparing for it by a good confession.@

AAnd you, Sister, tell us your thoughts on the subject of this conference.@

AI thought, Monsieur, how important it is to make a good Communion, that we can commit a great sacrilege, and, by making a bad Communion, add a new sin to those already committed.@

AAnd what means should be used to make a good Communion, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that the chief means is to make a general confession and to have a strong desire for Holy Communion.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Awe have several reasons for eagerly desiring to receive Holy Communion as worthily as possible. One is the excellence of this mystery which, understood

only in the manner of which we=re capable, warrants that we devote all our thoughts to desiring it and perform all our actions with the intention that they may be so many preparations and dispositions for it. Another reason is the benefit we derive from a good Communion, which is far greater, since it can make us one with God. A really heartwarming motive is the desire manifested by Our Lord that we should receive Him worthily when, through His great love, He instituted this Most Blessed Sacrament--may He be forever blessed for it!--and He also willed that Holy Church should oblige us to receive it under pain of death.

AOne of the signs by which we may know if our Communions are made in accordance with God's plan is that our soul is really and truly united to Our Lord. This makes us like Him in a certain sense by the practice of the virtues of which He gave us the example when He was on earth, and also by correcting our faults. We should likewise fear that our Communions may be badly made when, through deliberate negligence, we continue with the same bad habits and inclinations. If we were so unfortunate as to be led into mortal sin through them, it would be a clear sign that we had made bad Communions for our own condemnation. And should it happen that a sincere soul became aware of or questioned whether she had made a good Communion, she=d then have innate knowledge of it and would say to herself, >*Quoi*! you miserable creature! you=ve been so heedless as to approach your Lord with such a sin!= And, after regretting it, she=d promise God to prepare herself better in the future. If, however, she was a sinful, hardened soul, she=d pay no attention to those interior warnings, but would become even more hard-hearted and would eventually reach the point of receiving Communion after Communion to no advantage. Such a soul would be in a deplorable state. Let's fear such a disposition, Sisters; may God in His divine mercy preserve us from it!@

AThe better to prevent ourselves from falling into this sin, I thought it would be well to stir up within myself an ardent desire for Holy Communion, to act in such a way that this desire should always be like a new desire, similar to what I would have if I hadn't been to Communion for a long time, and to have no other intent than union with Our Lord. Another means is to dispose myself to make a good confession--humble, complete, and with full confidence--making use of the grace we receive from Jesus crucified. It's also being very grateful for the loving grace given us by Our Lord, who showed that He had a great desire to give himself to us in this Most Blessed Sacrament.@

AGod be praised, Sisters, for the thoughts He has given you! Sister has said that, when we experience peace and satisfaction in our conscience, it's a sign that we=ve made a good Communion. I can say that this is true, Sisters, but it isn't the only sign, for there are others. I can also tell you that it isn't always an infallible sign, for there are souls so hardened to sin that nothing moves them, and there are others so obtuse as to have no sentiments of fear or love. To grasp this truth, think about Saint Catherine,[1] who had such love for Our Lord and worked so assiduously at her perfection. At the time of Holy Communion, she was tortured by such abominable thoughts that she feared being abandoned by God. In the moments when Our Lord communicated himself tenderly to her, she spoke to Him heart to heart. One day, when she was complaining to Him of those horrible images, He assured her that, when they were at their worst, He was in the center of her heart. That's how it is with certain souls whom God is pleased to try in this way, Sisters. I knew a very virtuous person so violently attacked by those horrible troubles at the time of Holy Communion that I really felt sorry for her. Outside the time of Holy Communion she never had any thought like that; those thoughts were so terrible that I wouldn't dare mention them to you. Since God is pleased to try His own, Sisters, don't think, every time

you feel so troubled, that your Communion hasn't been well made. Still, you must use every means to remain peaceful and to have your mind at rest at the time of Holy Communion.

ASister rightly added that to receive Communion without due preparation is to put yourself in the danger of committing a sacrilege and is to receive Communion to your condemnation. Another said, >If I approach it unworthily, it's a serious sin=; and a third, that it's to mingle mud with precious stones. All that is true, Sisters. What an insult to Jesus Christ! What a misfortune for a person who receives Communion unworthily! O Sisters, my dear Sisters, may God will to preserve you from that! May God preserve us! What a sin, Sisters! It's true, dear Sisters, that to receive Communion without being well prepared places us in danger of committing a sacrilege, but do you know what it means to commit a sacrilege? It's to try to unite something sacred to something profane. What an evil, my very dear Sisters! May God will to preserve us from that! It's to remove God from our heart in order to give it to a creature; it's as if you wanted to put a precious treasure in mud. Let's be very attentive to what we=re about to do when we want to receive Communion, Sisters, for a sacrilege is a mortal sin.

AAnd what do you think one of our Sisters meant when she declared just now that to go to Communion without being well prepared is to receive it to our condemnation. It wasn't she who said that, but Saint Paul, who commands us, telling us to test ourselves when we want to eat this Bread. And what do you think this test is if not due preparation? Otherwise, as Saint Paul says clearly, we receive it to our condemnation.[2] What a misfortune, Sisters! Look what happened to Judas. He received Communion without this preparation because he had made up his mind to betray Our Lord. And what happened to him? Something dreadful, Sisters. The devil entered into him. I tell you this so that you may learn to benefit from Holy Communion. So let's be very careful, dear Sisters--both you and I, miserable man that I am--that this disaster of making an unworthy Communion doesn't befall us.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! You see, you really must make the effort to reflect attentively on the subject proposed to you for the conferences so that they'll be helpful to you. The last one I attended greatly consoled me; each Sister shared her thoughts sincerely, and it seemed to me that they were like sparks igniting a huge fire--like one candle that was lighting the others. How useful it would be for you, Sisters, if you acted like that!

ATo make things easier and to help you to remember, from now on you'll have to prepare only two points: first, the reasons and motives we have for doing or not doing something, that is, why we should or shouldn't do something that's proposed to us; second, the means of doing well what is proposed. Once you know the points, Sisters, say to yourselves before God, >It has been suggested that I do this. If I do it, how will it benefit me? If I don=t, what harm will come to me?= In this way, Sisters, you'll easily find reasons; and, after going over them carefully in your mind, by God's grace you'll feel a greater desire and inclination to do what was suggested. In the name of Our Lord, I entreat you to give this matter close attention. Blessed be God, Sisters!

ASeveral motives occurred to me on this subject and I dwelt especially on two of them. One is what you=ve already said, namely, that if we make a bad Communion, we receive our own condemnation. How we should dread this danger, Sisters! When I was passing through the courtyard of Saint-Lazare on my way here, I heard that the Court of Justice had convened regarding the condemnation of a man.[3] That touched me deeply; yet, what is temporal condemnation compared with spiritual? The state of that poor sufferer seemed deplorable to me because he was waiting for the sentence of condemnation. In the same way, receiving Communion unworthily is a condemnation that is carried out before God.

ASisters, what do you think is the state of a soul that's poorly prepared in approaching Holy Communion? If she could feel it, she=d be terrified! And yet, nothing is more true, it's a sentence of condemnation--or rather it's the condemnation itself that's being carried out because, instead of being united to the Author of life by eating this divine Bread, she distances herself from Him by the bad dispositions she brings to its reception.

AThe second reason is that, not only is it a condemnation, Sisters, but it's really death for the soul. We can say of the soul that receives Our Lord unworthily, >That soul is dead,= since it doesn't have the life of grace and remains dead as long as it's in that state. On the contrary, the soul that receives Communion after due preparation receives at the same time this life of grace and the Source of all grace.

ANot only does death enter into the soul of those who make a bad Communion, Sisters, but sometimes even physical death ensues. How many persons do you think there are whose days on earth have been shortened, perhaps in punishment of this great evil, and perhaps also to prevent them from continuing to dishonor God by the bad use they make of Holy Communion? Sisters, God is just. And how many calamities, how many diseases there are! Who knows whether they=re not in punishment of such sins? Although we mustn't judge, such things may happen.

AOne of the benefits we receive from a good Communion, Sisters, is that we become one with God. *Quoi*! a poor Daughter of Charity who, before her Communion was what she is, that is, something worth very little in itself, becomes one with God! Ah, Sisters, who would want to neglect this benefit? What a grace! What do you think it is, Sisters, if not the pledge of a blessed eternity? Could we imagine anything greater, dear Sisters? Oh no! it's not possible that a poor, weak creature might be united to a God! May He be forever blessed!

AI'm moving from this point, on which I'm not going to dwell any longer, to tell you, Sisters, that one of the signs of a good Communion is peace and tranquility of heart. In the person who has made a worthy Communion, this peace proceeds from knowing that she has done what she could, and her conscience doesn't reproach her in any way.

AIt's true, Sisters, that this is almost always a sure, infallible sign. And how could a soul in the state of grace, united to God in this Holy Sacrament, fail to possess true peace, Sisters, since it was often one of the first graces Our Lord used to give when He was on earth!

APerhaps some of you will say, >But, Monsieur, everyone who makes a good Communion always enjoys this grace.= Not at all, Sisters! I=ve already told you that sometimes, instead of this peace, the soul remains downcast and without feeling. This occurs when God is pleased to test certain souls among those most dear to Him, as I=ve already pointed out to you in the case of Saint Catherine and that other person who was never plagued by bad thoughts except at the time of Holy Communion.

AAn almost infallible sign of a bad Communion, Sisters, is when we see no change, and the person who has been to Communion still remains attached to her bad habits, allowing herself to be carried away by her little lies, acts of disobedience, obstinacy, and idleness; always fighting with her pillow about whether to leave it to go to prayer. These and other petty weaknesses infallibly indicate that our preparation for Holy Communion isn't as Saint Paul desired, and which he declared is necessary to receive Communion to our salvation. Pay attention to this, Sisters, because Divine Providence has given these warnings to help you--and me too--for the future. What good reason I have, wretch that I am, to be fearful!

AAnother infallible sign of a good Communion, Sisters, is when we see the opposite of what I=ve just told you; when we work zealously to make ourselves like Jesus Christ in our

conversation and manners; when we obey with ease; when we rid ourselves of our particular attachments; when all the places to which obedience calls us are indifferent to us; and when we consider only the accomplishment of God's Will in whatever He is pleased to have done with us--whether we=re sent to the country, or placed in a parish, or kept at the Motherhouse. In that case, dear Sisters, we can say in truth that a soul has done its utmost to dispose itself for the reception of the Most Blessed Sacrament. In the name of God, Sisters, reflect seriously on this and be convinced that preparing well for Holy Communion is the most important thing you have to do in your whole life. Your perfection and salvation depend on it.

AWell now, dear Sisters, it's getting late. We can conclude from everything we=ve just said that those souls are blessed who do their utmost to remain in the state of always being able to make good Communions. Those souls are also always looked upon tenderly by God; never, never are they separated from His holy presence.

ABut, Sisters, one of the reasons that comes to my mind--and which I regard as the most important as far as your vocation is concerned--is that you=re destined by God to prepare souls to die well. Do you think, Sisters, that God expects you simply to bring His poor persons a piece of bread, a little meat, some soup, and some medicine? Oh no, Sisters! that wasn't His plan in choosing you from all eternity to render Him the services you do for Him in the person of the poor. He expects you to provide for their spiritual needs as well as for those of the body. They need heavenly manna; they need the Spirit of God; and where will you find it in order to share it with them? In Holy Communion, Sisters. Both important persons and the simple need this, Sisters. That's why you must take special care to prepare well to receive the abundance of the Divine Spirit.

ASisters, I=ve spoken to you many times, but never of more important matters. Please be on the watch and reflect on the grandeur of God's plan for you: that He wants you, poor young women with little ability or education, to cooperate with Him in communicating His Spirit! Please don't neglect this grace, Sisters. But let's draw near to this fire to be first of all inflamed by it ourselves and then to draw others to it by our charity and good example. Bear in mind, Sisters, that the chief virtue of a Daughter of Charity is to make a good Communion; and remember that the best preparation is to go to confession and to rid yourselves of any bad habits and all attachments, such as relatives, friends, and places to which you may be naturally inclined.

AMay it please God, if until now we=ve failed to do this--I repeat, dear Sisters, may it please the Divine Mercy and Goodness to grant us, both you and me, this grace of preparing ourselves well for Holy Communion in the future! This is what I recommend to you and, since we=re unworthy of obtaining this grace, I entreat the Most Holy Virgin, by the love she has for her Son, to obtain it for us, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.@

24. - LOVE OF VOCATION AND ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR

February 13, 1646

Having taken the trouble of coming to give the conference, M. Vincent asked what the topic was. When he was told, he questioned a Sister on it. After that, he wanted to be fully informed of the danger from which one of our Sisters had escaped three or four days ago, by a great grace of God.

ASister,@ he said to her Awhat happened? I heard that a house collapsed. In what part of the city was it? Were you inside or outside? What day was it?@

The Sister replied that, on the last day on which it was permitted to eat meat,[1] she was taking a pot of soup to one of her poor persons. As she was going up the stairs, a poor water carrier in

front of her cried out, AWe=re lost!@ She was between the first and second floor, and no sooner had the poor man uttered these words than the house began to fall. Our poor Sister, terrified, crouched in the corner of one of the steps. The frightened neighbors ran at once for the Blessed Sacrament and Extreme Unction to be administered to those capable of receiving them. However, more than thirty-five or forty persons were piteously crushed beneath the ruins of the house, and only a child of ten or eleven years of age could be saved.

When the spectators saw our poor Sister in what appeared to be inevitable danger of death, they shouted to her to jump into their arms. Ten or twelve of them prepared to rescue her. She fastened the soup pot to the end of a fair-sized pole for them; then, relying on God's mercy, she jumped into the cloaks they were holding out for her. Unable to say how she had been transported, she found herself, by God's special Providence, out of danger and, trembling all over, set off to serve the rest of her patients.

After listening attentively to the whole story, M. Vincent lamented the fate of those who had died beneath the ruins of the house. He noted that Sister's fear was very legitimate, seeing that she had such a close call, and he cried out with his hands raised to heaven, A*O Dieu*! if the collapse of a house is so dreadful, Sisters, what will Judgment Day be like, when we'll see a countless number of souls miserably hurled into hell for all eternity? *O Dieu*! what will it be like? Blessed be God, Sisters!@

Then he asked for the views of several Sisters on the subject of the conference and, when he had listened to all of them with admirable patience, he continued in almost the following words, AI thank God, Sisters, for the thoughts He has given you. The ones I had have already been mentioned, and I'm infinitely consoled to hear those with which Our Lord inspired you. What's left for me to say now other than what you yourselves have already said? Yes, Sisters, you yourselves have said everything I might say to you. Blessed be God! But what touches me deeply, and what should strongly move you to love the service of the poor, is what one of you said, namely, that from all eternity God had chosen and elected you for that. *O Dieu*! What a compelling motive! Yes, it's true, Sisters, from all eternity God had His thoughts and designs on you and for you; and from all eternity you were in the mind of God to be in your present state because, Sisters, not only all that has been, and all that is happening now, but also all that will be in the future, is present to God, and millions of years are less than a day in His sight. How true it is, then, that from all eternity He intended to make use of you for the service of persons who are poor! What happiness, Sisters, and how the thought of God's eternal plan for you should oblige you to be grateful to Him for the choice He has made of you! Reflect well on that, Sisters!

AI=ve told you many times, Sisters, that you can be very certain God is your founder, for I can tell you before Him that in my whole life I never thought of it, and neither, I think, did Mlle Le Gras. I told you how it came about. However, because many of those here present weren't here then, I'll repeat it once more so that you may see God's guidance of your establishment.

AI'll tell you, then, that while I was living in a small town[2] near Lyons, where Providence had called me to be the Pastor, I was vesting to celebrate Holy Mass one Sunday when I was told that in an isolated house a quarter of a league away everyone was ill. None of them was able to help the others, and they were all in indescribable need. That touched me to the heart. During the sermon, I made sure to commend them zealously to the congregation, and God, touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people.

AAfter dinner a meeting was held in the home of a good townswoman to see what help could be given them, and everyone present felt urged to go to visit them, console them with their

words, and do what they could to help them. After Vespers, I took with me an upright citizen of the town, and we set out together to go there. Along the way, we met some women who had gone before us and, a little farther on, we met others who were returning home. Since it was summertime and the weather was very hot, those good ladies were sitting by the side of the road to rest and refresh themselves. In a word, Sisters, there were so many of them, you would have said it was a procession.

AOn my arrival, I visited the sick persons and went to get the Blessed Sacrament for those in greatest danger--not at the parish church for the district wasn't a parish but depended on a Chapter of which I was the Prior. So, after I had heard their confessions and given them Holy Communion, the next thing was to see how to provide for their needs. I suggested that all those good persons animated by charity to go there might each take a day to make soup, not for those sick persons only, but also for others who might come afterward, and that's the first place where the Confraternity of Charity was established.[3]

ANow, Sisters, see whether that's the work of human persons or whether it's clearly the work of God, for was it human beings who had made those poor people ill? Was it human beings who had inflamed the hearts of all those who went off in droves to bring them some help? Was it human beings who had planted in their hearts the desire to provide them with regular assistance--not only them but also those who might come after them? Oh no, Sisters! that's not the work of humans; it's clear that God was powerfully at work there, for human beings could never have done it; no, Sisters, there was no way they could have done it.

AI was recalled here and, a short time later, we went to give a mission in Villepreux, a village five or six leagues from Paris. There we had the opportunity to set up another Charity--the second one. Next, we were able to establish it in Paris; Saint-Sauveur was the first place to have one, and all the other principal parishes followed suit. But since there's a large number of sick persons in Paris, they were being poorly served because the Ladies couldn't commit themselves to that: a wife because of her husband and her household, a daughter because of her father and mother. In short, things weren't going well because God wanted there to be a Company of Sisters who would be specifically for the service of the sick under the guidance of those Ladies.

AThe first of these Sisters was a poor young woman from the country;[4] I have to tell you this, Sisters, to let you see the Providence of God, who willed that your Company be composed of poor women, either by birth or by the choice they would make of poverty; yes, Sisters, I say poor women because you must be so in reality. This poor young woman had given herself to God to instruct, to the best of her knowledge, the children of her village and, while tending cattle, had learned to read almost on her own, for no one had taught her. She would stop a passerby and ask, >Monsieur, please tell me what these letters are, what this word means,= and in this way she taught herself in order to teach others.

AWhenever she learned something, she taught her companions. We went to that place to give a mission, and God soon showed that this didn't displease Him. When this dear young woman heard that people were looking after the sick in Paris, she wanted to serve them. We had her come here, and she was placed under the direction of Mlle Le Gras and at the service of the sick poor in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish. A short time later she caught the plague and died at Saint-Louis Hospital. The Sister who was serving the sick at Saint-Sauveur took her place.

AAnd that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn't then what it is now, there's reason to believe that it's still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it; for, Sisters, don't think that Communities are formed all at once. Saint Benedict, Saint

Augustine, Saint Dominic, and all those great servants of God whose Orders are so flourishing, never dreamed of doing what they actually accomplished; but God acted through them.

AIt is said that events whose initiators can't be discovered proceed from the hand of God. Since your institution is not the work of human persons, you may therefore boldly declare, Sisters, that it's the work of God. Surely a Company ordained for a ministry so pleasing to God, so excellent in itself, and so useful to the neighbor, can have no other author than God himself. Has anyone ever heard of such a work before now? There are many Religious Orders, of course; hospitals have been founded for the care of the sick, and devoted religious have served them; until now, however, it was unheard of to have the sick poor nursed in their own homes. If someone in a poor family became ill, the husband had to be separated from his wife, the mother from her children, and the father from his family. Up to the present, my God, You didn't establish any orderly way to assist them, and it seemed that Your adorable Providence, which never fails anyone, had no concern for them.

AAnd why do you think, Sisters, that God waited so long to come to their rescue? It was because that was reserved for you. Yes, you were destined by God from all eternity, as Sister has so very well remarked, to be numbered among the first. What a privilege, Sisters, for those who enter an Order in the first sixty to one hundred years--that is, in its first century, which is the golden age--are called the founding members, and so you are among the founding members. Please consider carefully to what that obliges you, Sisters.

AIf it wasn't God, Sisters, who brought about what can be seen in your vocation, would it be possible for a young woman to leave her native place, her relatives, the pleasures of marriage--if it can be said to have any--her little comforts, and the diversions found in companionship and society, to come to a place she's never seen, to live with Sisters from places far from her own home, to devote herself, in voluntary poverty, to the service of convicts, poor children abandoned by their relatives, the sick poor languishing in filth, and even persons who are in prison? No, Sisters, God alone can do that! He has willed that one Sister come from Lorraine, another from Sedan, another from Angers, and others from elsewhere, and this is the place of which He said, >I will call you from all the nations of the earth.=[5] So then, He is the one who willed this Company of Sisters from different regions and wanted all of them to be of one heart. May His holy and adorable Name be forever blessed for it!

AAnother reason is God's very special protection over you. Isn't it wonderful, Sisters? You have a recent example of that in the case of your dear Sister. Doesn't that help us to see that God is pleased in a very special way with the service you render Him in the person of the poor? Is anything more obvious? A brand new house collapses; forty people are crushed beneath its ruins; this poor Sister with her soup pot is huddled on a step that Providence expressly preserved to support her, and she emerges from the danger safe and sound. The angels bore her up; believe it, Sisters, for what indication is there that human beings did it? They certainly lent a hand to it, but the angels bore her up. Do you think, Sisters, that God allowed this new house to collapse, without some special purpose in mind? Do you think it caved in simply by chance when our Sister was present, and do you think that it was just good luck that she escaped without injury? Certainly not, Sisters; all that is miraculous. God had ordained it all to let your Company see the care He takes of it.

AIt isn't to our Sister alone that such a remarkable grace is granted, it's to all of you; it's to confirm you in the belief you should have that He's pleased with your service; it's to let you see that you=re as dear to Him as the apple of His eye; it's to oblige you, Sisters, to have unshakable

trust in His Providence, which will never abandon you. Oh no, Sisters! you can be certain of that; this incident is an unquestionable indication of it. You'll be safe wherever you go; you'll often see the wrath of God punish a multitude of sinners with sudden and violent death, without the chance to turn back to Him; you'll even see many innocent persons perish, and you will be preserved. Yes, God is watching over you and sees to your protection.

ADo you think that the ceiling that collapsed about a year ago is another weak proof of this truth? It's one of the strongest. It's a miracle that a beam should crack in a place like that and that no one was either above or below. Mlle Le Gras was there; a Sister heard a cracking noise and told her that they weren't safe there, but she made light of it. An older Sister repeated the same thing to her, and in deference to her age and experience, she left the room. Scarcely was she in the next room (just think, Sisters, it wasn't three steps away) than the beam broke and the ceiling fell in.[6] Can you tell me that this happened without God's special plan? I was due to be here that very afternoon; we were supposed to have a meeting regarding some important matters. The cracking of that beam wouldn't have been noticed amid the noise that goes on at meetings. That good Sister wouldn't have been there because the Sisters don't attend those meetings, and we would all have been crushed beneath had God not caused a certain business matter to detain me and kept all the Ladies from being here.

AThings like that don't happen by chance, Sisters; don't you believe it. To escape the prediction that had been made to him that a house would fall on his head, a man went off to the country. A tortoise being carried off by an eagle fell on his head and killed him. So much for being in a safe place, Sisters! And you=ve been spared in houses that have collapsed! All of you together must thank God for this special proof of His Providence that He has given you once again in the person of your Sister. Yes, you should, Sisters, and I ask you to be sure to do so, and let your next Holy Communion be for this intention. When I heard about it I celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving; and now that I have further details, I'll do it again, please God. May His Holy Name be forever blessed!

ASo then, dear Sisters, those are some strong motives to encourage you to have great respect for your vocation because it's pleasing to God, and the neighbor is assisted by it. Live it joyfully and without fear because God himself is protecting you.

AOne means of doing as God wills is to do it in charity--in charity, Sisters. How excellent that will make your service! But do you know what it means to do it in charity? It's to do it in God, for God is charity, and it's to do it purely for God; it's to do it in the grace of God, for sin separates us from the charity of God. I=ve already told you on other occasions that you won't be true Daughters of Charity until you=ve purified all your motives, rooted out all your sinful habits, and rid yourselves of your particular attachments. I repeat this to you, Sisters, and it's so necessary that, if you don't do it, you=re in no state to go to Communion; indeed you=re not, Sisters, for it isn't permitted to approach Holy Communion with an attachment to sin, even were it simply venial. What then would it mean, Sisters, for a Daughter of Charity to approach this sacrament, I'm not saying with an attachment to mortal sin--God preserve us from that; *O Dieu*! that would be a sacrilege!--but with a weakness for venial sin? It would mean that she's unwilling to mend her ways. For instance, a Sister has an attachment to another Sister; she seeks her out, whispers in her ear, tells her the things that annoy her, reports the humiliations she has received. Such an attachment is vicious, and a venial sin at the least. A Sister who is under the influence of this and receives Communion with no intention of curing herself, does so with an inclination to sin, and in good conscience she mustn't receive until she's willing to give it up.

I=ve already told you that you should inform your Superior or your Director as soon as you feel attached to anyone.

AAnother Sister will serve the sick in a parish; she may become attached to one of the Ladies, an officer, or a confessor. She should make this known promptly and crush that serpent's head while it's still young. If she doesn=t, she'll be serving the parish and not the poor; she'll be ministering for her personal satisfaction and not for the motive for which she should be doing it. In the name of God, Sisters, let's be very much on our guard against such acts of infidelity, for they keep us away from the altar. As soon as a Sister discovers that she's attached to a place, a lady, or a confessor, she should mention it at once. *Mon Dieu*! That's so easy! She'll do it if she wants to make progress. So do it, Sisters, should it happen to you, so we can see where to send you to serve God for himself alone, without any involvement with or attraction for anyone.

AAnother Sister may have an aversion for her companion. Everything the latter does will displease her; if someone speaks to her about her, she'll try to lower the esteem in which she is held; if this Sister says something to her, she won't take it the right way. If she doesn't correct herself, she also goes to Holy Communion with an attachment to sin, and she mustn't do that. It's so easy to correct this! I have an aversion for a Sister, but I don't want to nurture it; I'll speak gently to her; if she tells me something, I'll listen to her willingly; when people speak to me about her, I'll be careful not to say anything that may lower or diminish the esteem in which she is held.

AIf you act in this way, Sisters, you'll advance because you'll benefit from your Communions and conferences. *Mon Dieu*! how I hope that you'll understand clearly the Spirit of God in the conferences and will get used to sharing your thoughts, as you=ve just done. I'm delighted to see this disposition in you because you can see what subject matter your thoughts furnish me. I'm not saying anything of my own; I'm simply repeating what you yourselves have said to me. Blessed be God! I desire this so ardently that I can truly say that I don't think I want anything else. For you see, Sisters, all attachments, aversions, and those obstacles that hinder the good results of Communions and instructions are the work of the devil, who is bursting at the sight of what you=re doing and does his utmost to prevent you from benefiting from it. >What am I doing here?= he'll suggest to the Sisters in this house, >I came to serve the sick and I'm not being sent to them.= And to a Sister in a parish, >I=d do much better if I were at the Foundlings.= And he does all this so that when she goes to Communion with either these attachments or aversions, she gains nothing from it. When you feel that way, Sisters, say so immediately.

AAnother motive, already mentioned by one Sister (see, Sisters, I'm only repeating what you=ve said), is that, in serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ. How true, Sisters! You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she'll find God there. As Saint Augustine says, what we see with our eyes is not so certain because our senses sometimes deceive us, but the truths of God never deceive. Go to visit a chain gang, you'll find God there. Look after those little children, you'll find God there. How delightful, Sisters! You go into poor homes, but you find God there. Again, Sisters, how delightful! He accepts the services you do for those sick persons and, as you have said, considers them as done to himself.

AAnother motive, also given by a Sister, is that God has promised an eternal reward to those who give a cup of water to a poor person; nothing is more true, we can't doubt it; and that's a great source of confidence for you, Sisters, for if God confers a blessed eternity on those who have given them only a cup of water, what will He not give to a Daughter of Charity who has left

everything and makes the gift of herself to serve them all the days of her life? What will He give to her? We can't even imagine! She has reason to hope that she'll be among those to whom He'll say, >Come, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you.=[7]

AYet another motive is that the poor persons assisted by her will be her intercessors before God; they'll come in a crowd ahead of her and say to God, >My God, this is the Sister who helped us for love of You; my God, this is the Sister who taught us to know You.= For you see, Sisters, you said the most important thing of all when you stated that they had to be helped spiritually. >My God,= they'll say, >this is the Sister who taught me to hope that there was one God in three Persons; I didn't know that. My God, this is the Sister who taught me to hope in You; this is the Sister who taught me Your goodness through her own.= In short, Sisters, that's what the service of the poor will earn for you.

ASo then, I entreat you to be very devoted to persons who are poor and take great care to teach them the truths necessary for salvation. You=ve noted how important that is, and it's so true. I=d really like to discover some means to do that; with God's help we'll work something out for you. In the meantime, do your utmost.

AOne Sister made a very pertinent remark: >Before all else,= she said, >we must see that the sacraments are administered to the patients.= When you bring them what they need, Sisters, it's advisable to find out very quietly, and in a sympathetic, friendly, compassionate way, whether they=ve been to confession and, if they haven=t, to help them to be well disposed to do so!@

Thereupon a Sister objected that very often the priests didn't pay any attention to this. ASister,@ replied M. Vincent, Abe very careful never to think that they neglect this duty; but, once you=ve informed them, then your conscience is clear before God. One of you very aptly remarked that it was good to teach poor persons how to make an act of contrition and to instill in them the desire and resolution to go to confession. So do that, Sister, and if their condition deteriorates, you could inform the Pastor a second time--never by way of complaint, however, but gently. You might say to him, >Monsieur, this poor patient is getting worse; I'm afraid he may not recover; I felt obliged to let you know.= And do it gently.

AWell now, it's getting late; it's time to stop. In conclusion, I ask God to give you His Spirit and the fullness of your vocation and to pour out His blessings on the whole Company so that it may fulfill His holy Will in this world with such fidelity that it may merit one day to enjoy His glory in the next. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

25. - INDIFFERENCE

May 1, 1646[1]

AI wasn't expecting to have a meeting today, Sisters. I had intended to postpone it to another day and thought I had made that clear in the reply I sent, but you must not have received the message. I was prepared to speak only to three or four Sisters who, by the order of Providence, are to leave tomorrow for a foundation in Le Mans,[2] but, since the same Providence has brought all of you together, let's say a few words, *in nomine Domini*.

AOur short conference, then, will be on the indifference Daughters of Charity must have regarding their places of residence and their ministries, the qualities required for the Sisters who are sent to them, and the means of carrying out their obligations well.

AWe'll begin with the first point, which is indifference, and so necessary to your Company that when it is no longer found in it, that will be a sure sign of its downfall. That's why those who want to be true Daughters of Charity must be totally indifferent to whatever God wills to

ordain in their regard: to be sent to this region or to another, to minister in this duty or in that, to be given orders by this person or by someone else; in a word, to be indifferent to everything.

ADon't you see, dear Sisters, how every Sunday the people make public profession of the obedience they are willing to render to their Pastor by walking behind him in the procession? Do you ever see a single one of them turn back once they=ve begun to follow him? When they leave the church they have no idea where they=re going, nor by what route their Pastor will lead them. Most often, they go without knowing where, and it's done that way to indicate their disposition to go wherever he chooses to lead them, be it to banishment or even to death. That's why those Sunday processions were initiated.

AFurthermore, we=ve never seen a soldier, from the day he enlists under a captain, disobey him. Yes, a soldier never hesitates when a captain says to him, >Fall back here, advance there, retreat, halt.= Moreover, I was talking recently to a gentleman, who has the honor to command a regiment, and I asked him, >But, Monsieur, are you always fully obeyed?= >Oh,= he replied, >there's never any failure in that respect, Monsieur. It's unheard of for a soldier not to advance, retreat, fall back, or give way when his captain tells him to do it. Very often we see clear danger; we=re going to perish; the enemy lies in ambush in the very place to which we=re being sent; we have to mount the breach, where we'll be fired on immediately, yet we march forward as soon as the captain gives orders, although we=re almost sure to die.=

ASisters, should greater obedience be found in those who go to meet death than in you who go to seek the glory of God? No, dear Sisters, I can't believe that! And if God willed to punish the Company by allowing one of its members to love one ministry better than another, one parish better than another, the company of one Sister better than another, and if she were to refuse to go where we might want to send her, at that moment you would have to raise your hands and hearts to heaven and say, >What have we done to God that He punishes us so rigorously as to have among us Sisters who resist His Will?= At that moment, you should begin to pray and do penance in expiation of the crime one of you would have committed; at that moment you should sigh, beg for mercy, take the discipline, wear hair shirts and penitential girdles--if you have permission to do so--and omit nothing that could appease the wrath of God, whose anger would be made manifest by such neglect of duty. Those who have a real love of their vocation and ask for nothing but the fulfillment of God's Will regarding the Company will experience those sentiments when they see disorders of this kind, which are devastating to total perfection.

AWouldn't it be distressing to see exclusive attachments or aversions among the Daughters of Charity: loving to be with one Sister and not with another; taking pleasure in talking with someone and not with your Superior; doing what has to be done in a certain place because you like it, but not in another because you get no pleasure from it! What a deplorable state that would be, dear Sisters! I hope, however, from the goodness of God, that none of you will fall into that and that there isn't one of you who isn't open to whatever God wants to do with her. Let's go on, then, to the second part, and discuss the qualities of Sisters who are sent to make a foundation.

AWhen Solomon built the temple he was intending for the service of God, he had quantities of precious stones--diamonds, rubies, topazes, hyacinths, emeralds, opals--cast into the foundation, while the upper portion of the building was constructed only of ordinary stones, of which a thousand weren't as valuable as a single one of those laid in the foundation. What do you think God might have wanted to teach you by that, dear Sisters? It meant that the Daughters of Charity who are now being chosen, and who will be chosen in the future, to go to foundations, must be precious stones--diamonds in firmness in their vocation and in the practice of their

Rules, rubies in their love of God and in charity toward their neighbor, emeralds, garnets, topazes, and opals--embellished with beautiful virtues, which appear as lovely colors whichever way they are turned and regarded. In a word, they should be such that it may be said of them, as was said of the foundation stones of Solomon's temple, >One of them is worth a thousand.=

AAnd do you know, Sisters, why those who go to make a foundation (for a house that's being opened and to which no one has yet been sent is called a foundation. You=re going to serve the sick in a hospital, in a place where no member of your Company has ever been; that's called going to make a foundation), do you know, I repeat, another very pressing reason? It's that those who go to make a foundation are models for all who will come after them. That's why they must have all the virtues that will ever be in all the others combined. All the good works that should ever be done in the place where they=re going to be established must first of all be practiced by them. I wish you could have seen what Saint Teresa said. . . .[3]

26. - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE VISITATION<R>OF THE PARIS HOUSES

[July 1646][1]

ASisters, making a visitation is no slight matter, and very few persons are capable of carrying one out in such a way as to make it helpful. It's one of the most difficult things to do well. Out of a hundred persons sometimes scarcely a dozen will be capable of it. One must be so prudent, so gracious, so gentle, so faithful to confidentiality--as secret as in the confessional!

ALet's just say a few words on this. In the first place, Sisters, it must be made in view of God alone and as the Blessed Virgin made it when she went to visit Saint Elizabeth, that is, with the greatest gentleness, charity, and love. She didn't reprimand anyone, but by her example taught Saint Elizabeth and her whole family what they should be doing. Don't ever rebuke anyone. Our Lord spent thirty years on this earth before reproving men, and He had come expressly to make a visitation He never reprimanded a priest, a Pharisee, a Samaritan, or a Jew during all that time, yet He saw them behaving very badly. Oh no, never give a rebuke, never! If a Sister tells you her failings, listen to her and encourage her gently, >Oh well! that's nothing, Sister. Our Lord will grant you the grace to become more exact. Alas! I commit many other faults.= And if she complains of another Sister, never let on that she has spoken of her to you.

AThe visitation must be made as if in passing. >I'm just coming to see how you are, Sister.= Never say to this Sister or that, >I'm going to that place,= and never mention any faults you may have noticed. Above all, beware of thinking that you must be a very important person because you=re being sent to others to make a visitation. *Mon Dieu*! that would be a hellish thought! >*Quoi*! from such a large number of Sisters, I=ve been chosen to make the visitation! They must surely have a good opinion of me.= Don't let such harmful thoughts cross your mind, but take a look at your own faults and reflect that if people were aware of them, they=d be very far from having a good opinion of you. >*Quoi*! miserable creature that I am! Must my hypocrisy deceive people?= For, when you look at yourselves before God, Sisters, you'll find that there's no one worse than you. I'm bound to think the same of myself, and so should everyone else. If you see that this Sister doesn't make her prayer, look at yourself and say, >Alas! what am I like?= This Sister may be irritable. >*Mon Dieu*! the way I am, I can't stand myself.= And so on for everything else. Always consider yourself as the most imperfect.

ANow, it seems to me that Mlle Le Gras has named many Sisters to make visitations, but, because all might not be capable of this, I think it's good to try two or three at first to see how that works out for us.[2] Sister Anne, you'll go in passing to Saint-Jacques and Saint-Gervais,[3] and you, Sister,[4] to Saint-Leu and to the galley convicts, and you'll tell me what you will have

remarked there. Above all, take your eyes and ears with you, but don't take your tongue.@

27. - THE PRACTICE OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND GENTLENESS

August 19, 1646

The first point concerned the reasons why Daughters of Charity must strive to acquire these virtues of respect and gentleness.

On this point it was remarked that:

(1) It pleases God and our neighbor.

(2) It's imitating Jesus Christ, who was full of gentleness.

(3) We couldn't be true Daughters of Charity if we didn't have those two virtues because there's no gentleness without respect, and without gentleness we have no charity.

(4) It's not enough to have charity toward strangers, but we must have it especially for our own Sisters. If we fail to show them respect and gentleness, it's a sign that we have no love for them; therefore, we=re Daughters of Charity in appearance only and are unworthy to bear their name and habit.

(5) If we had neither respect nor gentleness, that would give very bad example to our new Sisters and might dishearten all the young women who were thinking of joining our Company.

(6) Nothing can change the most embittered hearts more than gentleness. If we want to obtain something from a person, we ask for it respectfully and gently, and in that way are almost always sure to get it.

(7) If we=re gentle with our Sisters, they'll be the same with us, with the whole Company and with poor persons, with whom we=re especially obliged to be gentle.

(8) Considering the grace God has granted us in bringing us all together in a state that seems to be most in conformity with the laborious life and works of Jesus Christ, we must strive to acquire these virtues because from all eternity He intended us to serve poor persons with gentleness and cordiality. He gave us outstanding examples of this in several circumstances of His life, both with the sick who were brought to Him to be healed, and with sinners and those who persecuted Him, like Judas who betrayed Him, and the high priest's servant who struck Him.

(9) Among all the other virtues, respect and gentleness were recommended to us by Our Lord when He tells us, ALearn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.@

(10) He gave this lesson to His disciples before leaving them, ABy this,@ He told them, Athey will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.@

(11) In the same way, people will know that we=re true Daughters of Charity if they see mutual respect and gentleness among us, since these virtues can be produced only by charity.

(12) Respect and gentleness foster peace. Where there is peace, God abides. Works done in a spirit of gentleness and peace are much more pleasing to God, and He may be glorified by the good example the neighbor receives from them.

As to the second point, we=ve said in what those virtues of respect and gentleness consist, and what faults are committed against them. On this it was pointed out:

(1) That respect and gentleness consist in deferring in all things to all our Sisters, and, when we meet them, manifesting great submission with a happy, cheerful expression, which shows the love we have for them.

(2) Respect consists in doing willingly whatever our Sisters may instruct us to do, offering no objection, especially since we can show no greater honor to a person than by doing what he wishes us to do, not through constraint but willingly, lovingly, and cordially. Gentleness consists

in doing to our Sisters what we would like them to do to us, and in tolerating in them what we would want them to tolerate in us.

(3) These virtues also consist in being humble, obliging, and ready to help one another.

(4) In truly loving one another and always considering ourselves as the lowest, thinking that we owe much more respect to the Sister with whom we are living than she owes to us.

(5) In never allowing ourselves to do anything contrary to the honor we should show one another, looking on all our Sisters as daughters of the same Father, who loves every one of us tenderly and has chosen all of us to serve Him in the person of His poor, a ministry that demands gentleness of every kind, as He himself gives us the example in the Gospel proposed for our meditation today, when He so charitably cured the ten lepers presented to Him.

(6) In regarding our Sisters as the servants and spouses of Jesus Christ; if we=re respectful and gentle with the Spouse, we'll be the same with His spouses.

(7) In being very open, aiding and assisting our Sisters in whatever way we think we can relieve them, respecting them, greeting them with a joyful expression that is neither sad nor sullen, and manifesting our contentment with the admonitions they give us. And if we have any to give them, never doing so in public, but in private.

(8) In never using sharp or contemptuous language but, on the contrary, being very sincere and respectful, never rebuking one another with bitterness, but in a spirit of charity, and in being very condescending to whatever our Sister companion wishes of us.

Two faults against respect and gentleness were pointed out:

(1) Great contempt for one another, causing us constant quarreling and quibbling, with the result that we=re never willing to yield to one another; and being rude, disrespectful, and harsh in speaking to one another.

(2) To see our Sisters engaged in hard work and not help them, on the pretext that it's their responsibility, and to be satisfied to work slowly, without hurrying to be of assistance to them.

(3) To find fault with everything our Sisters do, and, should they think of asking our advice on something, to rebuff them rudely.

(4) To speak too freely and disrespectfully to one another in ordinary conversation.

(5) Should it happen that some slight unpleasantness occurs among us, not to excuse one another sufficiently, which may give rise to hurt feelings and murmuring, and affect charity.

The third point was on the means of correcting these faults, and there were eight of them:

(1) Always to see God in our Sisters, to have a high opinion of them, and to consider ourselves unworthy to be in their company.

(2) To take a firm resolution to strive for the acquisition of these two virtues.

(3) To mortify our strong feelings and to show gentleness, even if we are experiencing the contrary in our hearts.

(4) In the lives of the saints, we see that they excelled chiefly in these two virtues and practiced them even toward those who persecuted them. When they noticed any fault in other people, they reproached them only with great reserve and cordiality. If their admonitions weren't well received, they maintained the same spirit of gentleness and humbled themselves before God, thinking that perhaps it was their fault that others did not benefit from what they told them.

(5) To have great respect for the judgment of others and to mortify our own, always yielding to that of others; to correct others with great gentleness, recalling how gentle Our Lord Jesus Christ was with regard to sinners.

(6) Before speaking to our Sisters, to foresee how we should act with them; if something is

bothering us, to keep it from being obvious; and if our Sisters are troubled, to support them gently and sympathize with them, without complaining to others of what is happening.

(7) To view our Sisters with deep esteem, bearing in mind that they are persons on whom God has not disdained to cast His eyes in order to attract them to His holy service; esteem begets respect and respect engenders gentleness.

(8) to strive constantly to acquire these virtues in order to destroy the contrary habits.

(9) To foresee the occasions when we can show our Sisters some sign of respect or perform some act of gentleness, and not to neglect any opportunity of doing so.

(10) Above all, to make an effort to acquire gentleness in our hearts, because what is within will appear on the outside; and, to do so, never to harbor any resentment about what goes on among us; but, as soon as we perceive it, go to give satisfaction. In this way, we'll bring peace to both our Sister's heart and to our own.

All of the above was said by several of our Sisters, whom Most Honored Father took the trouble to question on the subject of the conference. Then he began to speak in almost the following words: AI thank God, dear Sisters, for the inspirations and knowledge His Goodness has given you on the subject of this present conference; by His mercy they have been clearer and more ample than on the other topics that have been treated for a long time. I thank Him for this with all my heart and beseech Him, who is gentleness, love, and charity, to be pleased, by His divine mercy, to instill in your hearts the truths He has made manifest to your minds. May it please His Infinite Goodness to pour into your hearts that spirit of respect and gentleness which, by His mercy, He has shown you to be so necessary! I think you=re really anxious to apply this to yourselves, dear Sisters. It certainly seems that you have it at heart; you couldn't have spoken of it with greater understanding.

ABut God has it far more at heart--God who asks it of you and who has imparted these things to you only so that you will make good use of them. By the mercy of God, dear Sisters, theologians couldn't have spoken about gentleness and respect better than you=ve done. If you haven't spoken with as much skill, you=ve done so lovingly and in such a way that it's clear that this comes from God.

AIt was said in the first place that gentleness and respect are most pleasing to God. Isn't that true, dear Sisters? And is anything more pleasing to Him than respect and gentleness, which are the virtues of the Son of God? As you=ve said so well, He himself taught us this. >Learn from me,= He said, >for I am gentle and humble of heart.= That is, dear Sisters, learn from me that I am respectful and gentle because by humility He means respect, for respect proceeds from humility. Was there ever a man more gentle and respectful than Jesus Christ? Oh no! He was gentle and humble toward everyone.

AHe didn't say, >Learn from me how to create worlds or angels= because we could never do that; that's proper to Almighty God alone; but He said, >Learn from me that I am gentle and humble;= and when He told us, dear Sisters, to learn from Him, He meant that we must learn to be gentle and humble. That's the hallmark stamped on those who belong to Him, and you=ve just brought forward the proof. >If you are divided,= He said to them, >you will not be recognized as belonging to me, but by this will people know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.=[1] So, rest assured, dear Sisters, that this is pleasing to God, and very much so, and by it people will know that you=re truly Daughters of Charity, for what is charity if not love and gentleness? And if you don't have this love and gentleness, you can't be Daughters of Charity. As has been stated, you=d have only the name and habit, and that would be a great misfortune.

May God in His infinite mercy be pleased to avert your Company from the above! Yes, Sisters, you must know that a Daughter of Charity who is on bad terms with her Sister, who saddens her, vexes her, and persists in that state, making no attempt to set things right by practicing those two virtues of respect and gentleness, from that time on she's no longer a Daughter of Charity; no, she isn=t; don't even mention her; it's all over as far as she's concerned; she's only wearing the habit. So, Sisters, hold fast to those virtues. That pleases God, and pleases Him so much that it's one of the things He finds most agreeable.

AIt was said in the second place that this practice is pleasing to the neighbor; yes, to the neighbor; and is there anything that can please him or her more? Two Sisters are seen to be living together as in a paradise, in harmony, gentleness, and respect. What one wishes, the other wishes; what one likes, the other likes. Is there anything more charming? Isn't that to begin paradise here below? And can the neighbor see anything that pleases him or her more? On the contrary, is there anything more ugly, more brutal--I may even say more diabolical--than not to get along well? For that's how the devils live in hell. They=re constantly tearing one another apart because of their rage and hatred for one another. One of the greatest torments of the damned is always to wish evil on one another, to be in a state of irreconcilable hatred and perpetual discord, and never, for a single moment, to agree among themselves.

ANow, rest assured, dear Sisters, that, as long as you=re gentle and respectful with one another, your house will be a paradise; but it will stop being so and will become a hell as soon as you=re unable to get along with one another and are neither gentle nor respectful. Then you'll be like the demons and damned souls.

AWhat could scandalize our neighbor more than to see two Daughters of Charity living together in a state of perpetual quarreling and disunion? You may be quite certain that the neighbors will know all about it immediately. They'll hear talk about it, and they'll be shocked--and rightly so--that women who have given themselves to God and renounced all things can be bitter toward one another. Ah! there's nothing more despicable. I know a town where this unfortunate state of affairs occurred; the people were so scandalized that, had it been been up to them to send away the Daughters of Charity, they=d never have wanted to see them again. The reason for this, so they say, is that they call themselves Daughters of Charity but aren't so, since they can't get along nor live in peace with one another. Dear Sisters, God's glory is diminished if your conduct doesn't correspond with your name and the dress you wear. That's a great insult to God! So you see, dear Sisters, the obligation you have to strive all your life to acquire and practice those two virtues in order to be true Daughters of Charity, to please God, and to edify your neighbor.

AOne means of doing this is to give yourselves sincerely to God to practice respect and gentleness toward others, and to begin this very moment by taking a firm resolution to do it for your whole life. We must pray earnestly for that; so let's pray for it all together, dear Sisters, and say with me now, >My God, in order to please You, I desire with all my heart to be respectful and gentle toward my Sisters, and I give myself to You once again to strive to acquire and practice these virtues in a way very different from what I have ever done. But, since I'm weak and can accomplish nothing of what I propose for myself without Your special assistance, I entreat You, my God, by Your dear Son Jesus, who is the essence of gentleness and love, to be willing to grant them to me, together with the grace of never doing anything contrary to them.=

ASo much for the first means, dear Sisters. The second is that the respect and esteem we must show our Sisters must come from our heart, which is their source, since the source of respect is

esteem, and esteem is formed in the heart, and from respect springs gentleness, as you=ve so well remarked--and may God bless the Sister who said it! Why, dear Sisters, would we not have a high opinion of our Sisters, since they are the spouses of Jesus Christ, who has himself lovingly sought them out? >But she's a poor young woman!= Oh! she's a soul who has been honored by being sought out by a God; she has consented to this, and He has taken her for His spouse. What higher dignity could she have? If she's a damsel, she's a young woman who has laid aside her headdress to wear this contemptible attire and give herself to God in a lowly state of life and of humiliations and difficulties because God has asked it of her. Nothing is more worthy of great esteem. A young woman will come from one hundred or one hundred twenty leagues, from Flanders, or from Holland, to consecrate herself to God in the service of the most abandoned persons on earth; isn't that going to martyrdom? Yes, without a doubt. A holy Father has said that anyone who gives himself to God to serve his neighbor and endures willingly all the difficulties he may encounter in this is a martyr. Did the martyrs suffer more than these Sisters? No indeed, they certainly didn=t, because having one's head cut off is soon over and done with. If they suffered greater torments, these still didn't last very long; they were quickly terminated by death. But those women who give themselves to God in your Company are sometimes with sick persons full of infection and sores and often noxious body fluids; sometimes with poor children for whom everything must be done; or with poor convicts loaded down with chains and afflictions; and they come under the authority of persons they don't even know but are bound to obey in every type of ministry. And you wouldn't consider such persons worthy of respect! They=re far more worthy of it than anything I could say to you, and I see nothing like it. If we saw the spot where a martyr had been, we=d approach it only with respect and kiss it with great reverence; yet, we=re capable of despising our Sisters, who are persons God preserves and enables to exist in a state of martyrdom. Hold them in great esteem, dear Sisters; keep that high opinion of them, no matter what may happen, and look upon them as martyrs of Jesus Christ, since they serve their neighbor for love of Him.

A >But she's so quick-tempered and peevish!= Well! Sisters, who is without fault? No one in the whole world; no, not a single person. Wasn't Saint Paul, who was such a great saint, one of the most quick-tempered and irascible men you could meet? He was a firebrand. Was there anyone more self-willed than Saint Peter? Look all around you, and you won't see anyone who's flawless. But take a closer look at yourself and you'll see many other faults because, Sisters, if we compare ourselves with our neighbor, we'll see clearly our own faults rather than hers, and will find that all the wrong is on our side.

A >But that Sister is so morose.= Well, Saint Peter wept constantly! If you see that your Sister is sad, you can be edified by thinking that she's asking God's forgiveness, and be ashamed that you=re not more sorry for your sins and are insensitive to the offenses committed against God. >But she's so moody that we never have any joy or consolation in her company!= Saint Catherine[2] took a woman to live with her who never gave her any consolation, and she served her at the price of great sacrifice, thinking that her own salvation was bound up with that.

ANo, Sisters, nothing should diminish our esteem for our Sisters. Everything must be interpreted in the best light. As the Bishop of Geneva says, if there are a hundred aspects of any affair, we should always look at the best side. So, dear Sisters, if anything comes up that seems unfavorable to your Sisters, refuse to believe it. There are some actions about which Superiors should be informed, but that should in no way affect the esteem you must have for your Sisters, for it's no slight fault to judge someone badly. It's against charity to judge your Sister. That's a

great evil, dear Sisters, and sometimes it may even be a serious sin, if the matter is important. For instance, I may suspect a person of something that's a mortal sin, and I mention it to someone else; I'm committing a mortal sin. Don't fall into that fault, dear Sisters, for it destroys the esteem on which you must establish the respect and gentleness you owe one another.

AThe Sister who said she intends to control her emotions and to appear gentle, even though her heart may feel the contrary, spoke very well. But tell me, Sister, don't you think that this is hypocrisy? Because isn't it making a show of something other than what you have in your heart?@ The Sister said no, and Most Honored Father picked up on that, saying, ANo, Sister, that's not hypocrisy, not at all; on the contrary, it's both virtuous and prudent not to let our Sister see the wound we feel in our heart from what she has said or done to us, but rather to show her a cheerful face and do all sorts of acts of gentleness!

A >But my heart is complaining.= That doesn't matter, Sister; it shows quite clearly that you don't agree to it. Don't stop, even though your poor heart is saddened and filled with bitterness because of the displeasure your Sister's words or actions have caused you. I repeat, don't stop being respectful, friendly, humble, and gentle toward her, and that heart will be consoled by it.

AI think someone also said that it was good always to condescend to the opinions of her Sister. *Mon Dieu*! dear Sisters, how very right the Sister was who said that, for there's nothing more gracious or easy. A great theologian advises us to condescend, if possible, to whatever our neighbor desires of us, in everything that isn't sinful. A Sister may say, >Let's go to such and such a place=; it's so easy to reply, >Right, Sister, let's go,= or, >Sister, let's do that this way.= >All right, Sister; that's fine with me.= And even if you sometimes think it could be better done in some other way, agree with her anyway, provided there's nothing wrong in it; and believe me, dear Sisters, your heart will have more sweetness and consolation in condescending that in following your own opinion. And you'll be so much more at peace!

AAttach great importance to each other's opinion, dear Sisters, and yield to it as much as you can because it's a great testimony of respect and an act of humility to believe, as far as possible, that your Sister's judgment is sounder than yours. How pleasing this is to God, and He will know well how to make things succeed in the way they should for His greater glory!

AI also share the view, dear Sisters, that this respect should be manifested externally by some sign, such as greeting or bowing to one another. In the best-regulated religious Orders in the Church of God, the nuns have a Rule that they make a slight inclination toward one another when they meet in the cloister, and, if they fail to do so, they accuse themselves of it and ask for a penance at the time of the visitation.

AWhy shouldn't you do this, Sisters, since God has willed that you have the honor of forming a Company in His Church? Shouldn't those who are its members be respected? The person you meet is the spouse of Christ; can you not at least greet her? You should do so especially, Sisters, when you meet in the streets and, in many cases, in the house as well. I don't think it's necessary inside this room, but it's well to do it as you enter. However, if a Sister is walking across the room and someone meets her, I see no objection to their greeting one another. But if she doesn't leave her place, or if she gets up to look for or to carry something, and this is a frequent occurrence, there's no need.

AParish Sisters who come and go to their room together need not bow every time they meet. But if a Sister comes in from the outside and finds her Sister in the room, well, what's to prevent her from greeting God, who is in her Sister's heart, and to prevent the Sister from responding? I think it's good for you to do this, dear Sisters; it's a mark of esteem, respect, and love. When a

Sister from another house comes here, greet her humbly, cheerfully, and graciously; let her see that you=re happy and contented to see her, and give her a welcome that will please her.

ATake care also not to talk too loudly, but reservedly, and very graciously. *Mon Dieu*! Some people are so gifted in that way and speak so gently and kindly that what they say makes a strong impression. I'm well aware that, because of faulty vocal organs, some Sisters naturally speak in a loud, harsh tone of voice and are unable to soften it because they don't have the ability to do so; but at least they should always act in such a way that it's clear that what they say comes from an affectionate heart.

AYou also show respect when two Sisters arrive at a door at the same time and one says to the other, >You go first, Sister= If she declines, then you may go on. But must this be done wherever you run into one another? There are many doors in the house, and maybe you meet someone there ten times a day. My reply, Sisters, is that it's not necessary on every occasion, but I think it would be well on most. When you meet at a door on leaving the house or entering a church, etc., always follow this practice.

ABut when you do this, Sisters, take care not to fall into another fault, by being too ceremonious, which would be contrary to simplicity. You really have to be careful about that. If you meet a Sister at a door and tell her to go ahead of you and she says, >You go ahead, Sister,= you should do it unquestionably. Then you'll be practicing two virtues: obedience and simplicity. You'll satisfy both your respect and your duty toward her by offering her precedence, and you'll perform an act of obedience and simplicity by going ahead when she tells you to do so. Above all, dear Sisters, never meet in the street without acknowledging one another. I already said that to you, and I'm repeating it again.

AAt a conference we had some time ago on this same topic, I gave you another means of practicing respect and gentleness from which, by the mercy of God, we=ve seen very good results. That's why we thought it would be well to give you yet another one, in order to renew yourselves in the practice of the instructions that were then given and to make fresh resolutions. I'm speaking about asking pardon of one another, dear Sisters, whenever something has happened that is ever so little contrary to respect, or has impaired gentleness. When your heart whispers to you that you=ve said some sharp or biting word, ask pardon because you must, Sisters, you must do it to soothe your Sister's heart and your own also, which will no doubt be pained by this fault. And what I'm advising you to do, dear Sisters, I assure you I=ve already done today myself, poor wretch that I am! Yesterday I happened to speak abruptly to a priest of our Company in a sharp, harsh manner. I should have spoken to him more gently. I noticed this afterward, and when I heard that he had to go out this morning, I sent word to the front door, asking him not to go into the city until I had spoken to him. When he arrived, I very humbly begged his pardon; so you see, Sisters, what I'm advising you to do, I try to practice myself.@

At this, a Sister asked to be told how she should act toward a companion who refused to forgive her, who reproached her for often falling into the same faults, and even ridiculed her. She added that her quick temper often caused her to fail frequently, but since the day she had been rebuffed, she hadn't dared to ask for forgiveness again.

ASister,@ said Most Honored Father, AI'm really glad you=ve made this objection to me, and I'm going to answer it. But, before I do, I must say that the Sister who acted that way behaved very badly. *Mon Dieu*! She committed a serious fault. To have ridiculed her Sister kneeling in front of her to ask pardon, and to say, >I couldn't care less about this asking pardon,= is a very serious fault! She should accuse herself of it and have the courage to confess it!

ALet me tell you, Sister--I'm not speaking to you, however, I'm speaking in general--that some people accuse themselves all their lives and never amend; no one ever sees them take a single step forward, never correcting themselves of anything, always hasty, always troublesome, always making blunders; and that's a little hard on those who have to live with them. Nevertheless, it's very wrong to rebuff them. When one Sister kneels down, the other should do the same and say, >I'm sorry, Sister; I'm the one who, because of my bad temper, have caused you to be annoyed,= or, >It's my own pride,= or something like that, depending on the subject, and she should never find fault with her Sister. *Mon Dieu*! What a great fault! We should always put ourselves in the wrong and believe that it's because of us that our neighbor is angry or has committed some other fault. As for those who unfortunately might not amend--I'm not referring to you, Sister, or to anyone in particular--they mustn't stop trying. You may rest assured, dear Sisters, that if you do so with genuine regret for your fault, by the grace of God you will improve and, if you see that you=re not improving, then I=d advise you to have recourse to penance, that is, to impose some punishment on yourself that's a little hard because, despite our repugnance to asking forgiveness, we do become accustomed to it, and sometimes it becomes very easy. But, when we do so in a spirit of humility, and join a penance to it, then we infallibly benefit from it.

AA man had a very bad and dangerous habit of cursing on every occasion. On one of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, God inspired him to go to confession in a church of Our Lady, and he was so touched that he took the resolution never to swear again. He was given a penance of giving a sou to the poor every time he swore. When he reached home he began to swear again. Immediately he took a sou from his pocket and gave it to a poor person. Another curse, another sou; however, since there was no poor person around, he put it in his other pocket to be given away at the first opportunity. And so it went. In the end, seeing that his money was disappearing, and since perhaps he didn't have too much of it, he corrected himself and, by the mercy of God, became such a fine man that he avoided like he would avoid hell persons who swore, and he couldn't tolerate them.

ALikewise, dear Sisters, when you=ve saddened your Sister or given her bad example by some habitual fault, impose a penance on yourself; for example, deprive yourself of half your dinner, if you can do so without becoming too weak, or take the discipline or put on the penitential girdle, kiss the floor, deprive yourself of talking for a certain time--unless someone asks you something--then you'll see, dear Sisters, that in a short time you'll become humble, respectful, gentle, pleasant, and very mellow. I know full well that this will be a little difficult for some and that perhaps there are persons who are rather hard to get along with, but I also know that, by the mercy of God, it's not the majority and that, among those who have these imperfections to contend with, a good number have improved since the last conference we had on this topic. If, however--God forbid!--someone unfortunately had no intention of correcting herself, she=d be much better off outside the Company. If she remained in it any longer, she=d greatly dishonor God, whom she had promised to serve, and would scandalize her neighbor, whom she's supposed to edify. If you become aware of this, dear Sisters, weep over this poor Sister, sigh, do penance, and ask God's pardon for her and for those Sisters to whom this disaster has happened. Please do it from this very moment, dear Sisters, and, for that purpose, imitate me and say with all your heart, >My God, we very humbly ask your pardon for our Sisters and for ourselves, who have been so wretched as to have become angry with one another and failed in the respect You so lovingly recommended to us, and in the gentleness that is so much in harmony with the title of Daughter of Charity which, by Your Will, we have the honor to bear.

We entreat You, by the perfect gentleness of Your very dear Son, to be pleased to eradicate those faults and to grant all of us the grace to be, from now on, of one heart and one soul for and in Your love.=

That's all I had to say to you, dear Sisters, on the subject of the present conference, reduced to four principal practices, the first being to fervently ask this gentleness and respect of God, to give yourselves to Him for that purpose, and to take an inviolable resolution to do so; second, to manifest these virtues exteriorly by greeting one another; third, to ask pardon of one another; and fourth, to impose a penance on yourselves if you fail.

AMay God in His goodness, dear Sisters, be pleased to pour forth abundantly on you His Spirit, which is nothing other than love, gentleness, graciousness, and charity, so that, by the practice of these virtues, you may do all things in the way He wants you to do them, for His glory, your salvation, and the edification of your neighbor! And I, although the harshest and least gentle of men, relying on the mercy of God, will still pronounce the words of blessing on you. I beseech Him with all my heart that, as I am uttering them, He may be pleased to fill you with His holy graces. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

28. - CONCEALING AND EXCUSING THE FAULTS OF THE SISTERS

Conference of October 22, 1646, on the obligation of Daughters of Charity not to blame the Sisters with whom they are living for the faults that slip into their practices.

The first point concerned the reasons for concealing the faults of our Sisters from those who shouldn't know them.

On this it was said:

(1) We cannot reveal the imperfections of anyone whomsoever without offending God.

(2) That is contrary to charity and, therefore, if we do things contrary to this virtue, we must no longer be called Daughters of Charity.

(3) It's a source of disedification; we=re the cause of people having less esteem for the Sister of whom we have spoken badly, and women who might want to join our Company will be turned away from it on seeing our lack of forbearance and charity.

(4) Our disrespect for our Sisters falls back on ourselves, as if we were to throw a stone into the air and it fell back on our own head.

On this point Most Honored Father said, AHow true that is, Sisters, and how well our Sister has spoken! For how much esteem can people have for a Daughter of Charity who is disrespectful to her Sister and tears her down? Alas! they can't have any; and even though at the time we seem to agree with what she says and are even glad to hear it, nevertheless, when we think about it afterward, and the feeling that led us to listen to her has passed, we'll say, >This Sister must have very little virtue, since she criticizes and maligns her Sister, instead of excusing and bearing with her.= So our Sister is excused and the other condemned, and just as if someone were so foolish as to spit up into the sky, the spittle would fall back on her face, so the blame she wanted to fall on her Sister will fall back on herself. Pay close attention to what will be said on this topic, Sisters; it's one of the most important we have to deal with because it's the means by which the devil tries to ruin you. I hope, however, that the Holy Spirit, who inspired us to consider it, will enlighten your minds and inflame your hearts to realize its importance and adopt its practices. Well then, *in nomine Domini, in nomine Domini, in nomine Domini*! Let's continue, please.@

(5) As Our Lord said to His disciples, AIf you love one another, you will be recognized as my disciples,@ so, if we love one another we'll bear charitably with the faults of our Sisters, and, by

that, people will know that we=re true Daughters of Charity.

(6) If we excuse those faults of our Sisters, we'll win their trust, and they'll be able to correct them with better results than if we mentioned them aloud or rebuked them bitterly.

(7) The habit of excusing ourselves causes us to commit many faults, which we don't notice immediately but only later when we examine ourselves; this sometimes troubles our conscience and prevents us from benefiting from our meditations and other spiritual exercises.

(8) Our Lord has made us responsible for bearing one another's burdens, and even taught us how to do it during His own lifetime, and this practice will promote union among us.

(9) Nothing impairs charity and union more than a lack of forbearance, and it's an offense against the whole Company if, when people see us failing in it, they think the Company doesn't practice this virtue.

(10) When we accuse our Sisters, and our excessive self-love and conceit lead us to impute to others faults of which we ourselves are guilty, that's a lack of humility and knowledge of our own weakness.

(11) It's a lesson the Eternal Father gave us through His Son, who practiced this virtue throughout His life, and even to His death when He made excuses for the ignorance of those who were crucifying Him.

(12) By the practice of this virtue, we fulfill the law of Jesus Christ, which is given only to those who tolerate the faults of their neighbor.

(13) Our Regulations require that we practice this virtue; this seems to be a serious obligation so as not to lead a disorderly life contrary to our Rules.

The second point dealt with how to conceal and excuse our Sisters= faults. The following observations were made:

(1) When we see our Sisters commit a fault, we should think that it's through inadvertence, that they didn't realize they were doing anything wrong, and that we ourselves fail much more frequently and do so deliberately.

(2) If they=re new to the Company, we can say that they=re not yet used to the Community and are still following the maxims of the world; and we must believe that this distresses them a great deal.

(3) If they are older Sisters, let's bear in mind that we have to work at this all our lives and that God allowed the saints themselves to fall sometimes; this is so that each of us will realize that of ourselves we can do nothing but sin.

(4) When a Sister comes to us to complain of her Sister companion, it will be well not to listen to her, or to change the conversation.

On this point, Most Honored Father said to the entire assembly, AThat's a good means of chopping off this accursed sin at the root, dear Sisters, because, as people say, if there were no receiver of stolen goods there would be no thief. Likewise, if there were no listeners, there would be no slanderers. O Sisters! never listen to them, never! Your Sister may come to you with her complaints; perhaps the poor thing is in a bad mood; that passes, and then she wishes she hadn't said anything to you. Nevertheless, her words would have made an impression on you, and you'll have a bad opinion of another Sister, who perhaps is quite innocent. Well, there's a lot to think about here, Sisters, because the person who complains is often mistaken, and the one who is accused wasn't thinking of doing anything wrong, as has been very well remarked. The first Sister was in no position either to see or hear what she thought she saw or heard, so, instead of charitably advising her Sister, when she sees you she's quite at ease to unburden herself to you.

Don’t let that happen, Sisters! Although, by the mercy of God, I’m certainly not aware of such great faults among you, they can, nevertheless, arise. The devil, who is very clever, begins with petty misrepresentations, little grumblings, and minor complaints, which end in serious disagreements and glaring detraction. For you see, Sisters, the prince of demons, the chief enemy of the works of God, who fears the good this Company will be doing, has undertaken the task of destroying it, and has commissioned a special demon to tempt you. This demon has nothing else to do; he observes you from every angle to discover the place where you can be assaulted. Just as God has given you a Guardian Angel especially to protect you, this demon exists expressly to destroy you, but he’ll do so only through your lack of forbearance and the complaints that ensue from it, soon to be followed by detractions, then by serious conflicts. What holds up this building? The foundation stone supports the one above it, the latter supports another, and each stone goes on supporting another; in this way the whole building is reinforced. May God, in His infinite goodness, be pleased to preserve us from such a misfortune! But to prevent it absolutely, never listen to complaints. That’s the means your Sister has just mentioned and it never fails.

A >But, Monsieur,= someone may say to me, >how shall I get my Sister to be silent? Shall I tell her she’s out of line? She’ll be annoyed at that.= Sisters, let me tell you a means that has just occurred to me, which I might forget if I waited until later. It’s to make no reply at all but rather to kneel down and ask God to send your Sister some thought contrary to what she has said to you. When she sees you in that position, she’ll come to her senses much more quickly than if you had said something to her.

ARecently I was thinking to myself, >What could keep this Company from surviving?= All that came to my mind was that despicable vice, for, as far as what is called >the great evil= is concerned, by the grace of God I don’t see it. Nor will it be for lack of excellent persons who love their vocation, nor the fault of the people because they love you and will always readily welcome you; it’s too much in their interest that the poor be served. No, it will happen because of you yourselves, if you don’t soon set to work at it seriously. That’s why you should take the resolution, beginning right now, to wage war courageously against it, Sisters. Every one of you must have a horror of this enemy. And if there’s anyone who doesn’t feel disposed to resist him, I=d advise her to leave the Company rather than be a scandal in it. If half of you were tainted by this evil--which is a very great one, Sisters, because it’s not always a simple imperfection but sometimes it’s a sin, even a mortal sin, as when you reveal the serious sin of a Sister, you yourselves commit a grievous sin--I repeat then, Sisters, if half of you were habitually unable to tolerate the faults of others, and were guilty of detraction in their regard, and if you were absolutely unwilling to rid yourself of this vice, I would advise that half to withdraw so as not to harm the rest of the Company because, Sisters, you’ll be responsible before God not only for the evil you committed, but also for that which you caused or for a lessening of the good that would have been much greater were it not for your bad example.

ABe very careful about this, Sisters, for some Sister among you may perhaps be lost for misusing the graces God gives her here in this house, for giving cause to others to offend God, or for hindering their greater perfection. And perhaps she might have been saved in her own home, where God wouldn’t have asked so much of her. In God’s name, Sisters, be very careful about this, and never forget the means just mentioned by our Sister. Let’s go on with the means.@

(5) It’s well for us to look at ourselves to see whether we are not the cause of the faults committed by our Sisters.

(6) Not to accuse our Sisters to our confessors, to whom we sometimes mention our

differences.

At this, our venerable Father, intervening again, said, AOh! never, Sisters, never to confessors! *Bon Dieu*! That would be a sacrilege! And if you do it outside of confession, it's detraction. To go and blacken the character of your Sister with a confessor is odious. During confession, speak about yourself and never of anyone else. Theologians hold that if one can't confess a sin without making known the person with whom one has committed it, it's better not to confess it. Charity is the queen of virtues, Sisters; is there anything that wounds it so deeply as to sully the reputation of our neighbor? Confession is necessary, but it's subordinate. Charity comes first, and if charity may be wounded by confession, give up going, for it's only the handmaid of charity, and must not be made to its detriment. Charity is supreme.

AIf you have something against your Sister, tell those who should know it and who can remedy it; tell your Superior or your Superioress, but never your confessors, who are there only to correct you for the sins you confess and to give you absolution, but not to hear about what goes on among you. I say this to you once more, in line with the theologians who were the first to put it forward: it's better not to confess than to reveal someone else's sin in confession; instead of receiving the merit of the sacrament, you=d add a sacrilege to your sins.

AIf you do it outside of confession, alas, Sisters! you are mentioning them to a man subject to the same failings as yourselves, who has no obligation to you to keep it secret and, after leaving you, will have the power and liberty to repeat what you had said to him. And to what does this sometimes give rise? Alas, Sisters! we=ve seen some who, because of an attachment to their confessors in this way, have been lost. Not, by God's mercy, that anything bad happened, but the confessor liked one Sister more than another and always considered her to be in the right. If she told him about some dispute or disagreement between them, he=d say that the other Sister was to blame, and he never brought them any peace. What a useful remark our Sister made! Watch out for that, Sisters; don't ever abuse confession, always bear in mind the obligations of charity, and never say anything outside of confession. The confessors to whom you reveal your Sisters= faults know full well that you shouldn't be mentioning them. If they=re in a place where people are talking about you, alas! they'll say quite freely, >These Sisters snap each other's heads off; you may think they=re worth something; if you knew them, you=d see how it is; they always have a bone to pick with one another; they tell the first person they meet all about their differences, with no charity or forbearance. I'm tired of hearing it.= That's how your confessors will treat you, Sisters, if you don't have the necessary discretion in dealing with them. You'll lose your good name, you'll scandalize one another, and you'll do harm to the Company.@

(7) Should it happen that the poor aren't served on time or haven't received their medicine, don't blame our Sister, but try to excuse her; and do the same if a Lady is displeased with her.

(8) If we have a little love of God, it will be easy for us to put up with the imperfections of our neighbor; and if we want to advance in virtue, we'll be glad when those little opportunities arise, so that we may strive to improve.

(9) When a person has something to say about a Sister, we'll try to excuse her, saying that she was taken by surprise and that, if God didn't restrain us all, we=d commit far more faults.

(10) Reflect that when we justify ourselves at the expense of our Sisters, we often change, more to our own advantage, the way things appear, and in this way we offend against the truth.

(11) If our Sisters should let slip a hasty remark, instead of judging that they have done something wrong, we should look into ourselves and see whether it was because of us that they committed the fault and whether we might have done worse than they did if they had treated us

in the way and as rudely as we treated them, and by these reflections, always try to excuse them in our own minds. If we can't do so with those who have witnessed their faults, it's well to justify their intention.

(12) Remember that, if we bear with our Sisters by concealing or excusing their faults, God will allow them to practice a similar charity toward us, and there's good reason for us to acknowledge that each one of us has great need of it.

(13) Try to overlook the faults of others and, in order to do this, excuse them and believe that they=ve acted inadvertently and with no ill will.

(14) Should it happen that we indicate to our neighbor that we=ve been offended by what she's said or done, ask her forgiveness for this as soon as possible, and let her see that we feel no resentment.

(15) When a Sister's fault is obvious to outsiders--be it the Ladies or the physician--we should conceal it, if we can do so without lying; if not, we should consider ourselves obliged to excuse her and to try unobtrusively to make amends for the fault. Since we are only one body, each of the members must put right and make up for the damage the other has done, but without letting it be known, if we can--not even to the Sister herself--unless it may prove useful for some other occasion.

(16) In order to commit ourselves to keeping silent about the faults of our Sister, we should remember that mentioning them is fatal to her.

Our venerable Father laid great stress on that remark: AHow well you=re speaking without even realizing it, Sister, for it's so true that those who deprive persons of their honor kill them! Legal experts tell us we have two sorts of life: physical life and the civic life which is our good name. The Daughter of Charity who tears down her Sister deprives her of this good reputation; she takes from her the favor she enjoyed from those who knew her, and causes her to die in their estimation. They take no further notice of her, just as people take no further notice of a man condemned by the law to civil death, which is banishment; he is deprived of his honor. In the same way, a person who has been slandered is deprived of her honor in the opinion of those to whom it is mentioned.

AWe see a good Daughter of Charity who looks after poor persons very well, carries out her duties at the right time, and fully satisfies the Ladies. Everyone is edified by her, and you go and say, >She's so bad-tempered! We can't live with her; she's not all that she appears to be.= You kill her, you deprive her of the reputation by which she existed in the estimation of those people. That's why our Sister spoke so well, and yet, she didn't realize what she was trying to say.

AReflect on all that; whenever you see yourselves inclined to speak ill of another, think in your own minds, >I'm going to say that, and no one is aware of it; I'll gratify my own anger but I'm also going to kill my Sister; I'm going to deprive her of her honor, and from now on her reputation will be ruined.= Sisters, if you had these reflections, I don't think you=d ever go any further. You were quite right in saying, Sister, that to make someone's faults public is to kill her, and yet you weren't thinking about what that implied. Well then! *in nomine Domini*!

AThe third point deals with the benefits that will accrue to us, each one in particular and the Company in general, if we=re faithful to the practice of the virtue of forbearance, that is, if we conceal and excuse the faults of our Sisters and accuse ourselves instead.@

On this point it was said:

(1) It's a means of acquiring humility, by which we'll draw God's graces on our Community, give good example to our neighbor, and help our Sisters to appreciate their vocation, seeing that

we bear with one another and put ourselves in the wrong rather than our Sister.

(2) God will be glorified by our mutual forbearance because it will prevent envy from arising among us, by which He's so often offended.

(3) We are kept in check by disregard of ourselves because, when we see a fault in our Sisters, we'll humble ourselves, recognizing that, without the grace of God, we=d be much worse.

(4) Our neighbor will be edified by it; we'll carry out our spiritual exercises with a stronger sense of the presence of God, greater cheerfulness, and a purer intention, and we'll love one another more.

(5) Great union, harmony, peace, and friendship will result in general and, in particular, great peace of mind, which is so necessary to obtain perseverance.

(6) Peace will be created in our Company from this reciprocal forbearance of our Sisters and ourselves. We'll mortify the passions of our heart, which might try to rebel against this virtue; we'll become more restrained in our conversations; by our example, we'll instill this virtue into the hearts of newcomers, who may not perhaps be aware of it, and when we=re faithful to it, then our Company will be truly a Company of Charity.

(7) By the practice of this virtue in the whole body, God will be glorified because in this way we'll honor the teaching and example of His Son when He was on earth.

(8) The merit of similar virtues practiced by Our Lord will be lavished on us if we practice them for love of Him.

(9) If we begin to practice these virtues of forbearance and excusing our Sisters, we'll form only one body and one same spirit, and thereby will have much greater power to draw down the graces of God that we need in order to strengthen and affirm our ministry in the service of God and of persons who are poor.

(10) The practice of this virtue will always keep our minds peaceful and humble, make us congenial with our neighbor, and greatly assist us to serve him or her; even in this world, we'll be able to share, in a certain sense, the reward promised by Our Lord to peacemakers because it will be easier for us to place ourselves in the presence of God and to remain there.

Most of the Sisters had something to contribute at this conference and said substantially part of what we=ve put down here, using the notes several had made on their meditation. When they had finished, Most Honored Father began to speak in almost the following words: AIt's getting late, Sisters, and you=ve grasped the importance of this subject so well that it's unnecessary for me to speak about it at any great length. You yourselves have recognized the evils caused by these faults, the scandal they give to your neighbor, the offense against God, the disorder they cause among you, the great disunion they create, how they disrupt the peace and make you irritating to yourselves. How happy you=d be without them! It would be paradise if you knew how to deal with it properly. Where there's charity, God abides. An important person has said that God's cloister is charity. He enjoys being there, His palace of delight is there, it's the dwelling place in which He is well pleased. Be charitable, be kind, have the spirit of forbearance, and God will live in your midst. You will be His cloisters, you'll have Him in your home, and you'll have Him in your hearts.

ANow, by His mercy, dear Sisters, there's reason to hope that you want this, and that you=re striving wholeheartedly to acquire this charity. That's why, given how well-disposed you seem to be, I'll make no further attempt to show you how productive it is for us to conceal and excuse the faults of our neighbor, since God himself has shown you sufficiently the advantages that will

accrue from this to each one of you in particular and to the Company in general. We'll just briefly go over the means God gives us to strive for His love because, Sisters, we have to work judiciously at that.

AThe first means is to ask it of God. Yes, Sisters, we must ask it of God, but it should be with all our heart; and while I'm speaking to you now, lift up your hearts to ask it of Him, and take the resolution never to let an opportunity pass of excusing your Sister, of bearing with her, and of doing your utmost to help her, without seeking your own interest.

AThe second means has been mentioned but, so you'll remember it better, I'll speak of it again. It's to kneel down when a Sister speaks ill of another. That's a great means! You won't say a word, but she'll see very clearly what you mean. She'll think about what she has said, and at that very moment will feel remorse for her fault and perhaps, by God's grace, will determine never to fall into it again. You'll also cause those who used to listen willingly to her to be touched by your example, and they'll be very careful not to imitate her. By the very act of kneeling down, you yourself will be humbled, and in your heart you'll excuse both the Sister who was maligned and the one who committed the fault. >Alas!= you may say, >what about us? This Sister has so many good qualities, and the demon never stops assailing her. If God didn't protect me from him, what would become of me?= Rest assured, Sisters, that the demon has God's permission to try your virtue in this matter, and he'll never lose an opportunity to tempt you. That's why you must always be on your guard.

AShould you ever lapse into slander, murmuring, or detraction, get hold of yourselves and say, >Wretched creature, what have you done? You=ve let yourself go over to the enemy; you=ve killed your Sister; you=ve ruined her reputation, you=ve scandalized the Sisters to whom you=ve spoken; what will they think of her now?= And at that very instant, Sisters, so that the bad impression caused by your words may go no further, and also because charity demands that we contribute to the good reputation of our neighbor, at that very instant, I repeat, and without further delay, go find your Sister, kneel at her feet, and say, >Sister, I'm here at your feet to ask your forgiveness. I=ve been so mean as to make such and such a remark about you; please forgive me and ask God to be merciful to me.= After that, go find the others and say to them, >Alas! pray for me; I=ve been so petty as to have allowed myself to say such a thing about my Sister! In the name of God, don't be disedified by it, but ask God to be merciful to me.=

AThe third means is, when we=re in a group of persons where a Sister is being maligned, to ask God to touch the heart of the poor Sister who's speaking to us, to go in spirit to heaven and to constrain God, so to speak, to give her some good impulse, to take some good thought from the Heart of Jesus, to ask the Holy Spirit to give her an inspiration appropriate to the situation in which she finds herself and--I keep going back to this--to get down on her knees. If the place is suitable, and nobody sees her, why not? But if the place is inappropriate, or if she doesn't feel moved to do so, then she shouldn't say a word, but lift her thoughts to God and ask Him with all her heart to touch the heart of her Sister. I don't think it advisable to say anything to the Sister, for she may not be in the mood to hear it. She has just been annoyed at that moment and might become more agitated if someone said something to her. It's far better to turn to God that it may please His Goodness to give her the necessary dispositions and to edify her by your silence and example, for no words have as much power.

ANo, Sisters, I=ve told you before and I tell you again, that nothing we can say by way of exhorting our neighbor to do her duty is as strong as example; sooner or later, you'll see the results. Blessed Jean de Montmirail[1] was one of the great noblemen of the Court and Constable

of France. He defeated the English before Compiègne and was one of the greatest landowners and most powerful men in the kingdom; his eldest son married the daughter of the King of England. After the father had labored long on behalf of the crown of France, he wanted to become a monk. >Father Prior,= he said to the Prior of the convent he had chosen, >I will carry out faithfully everything you do here; I will rise at the same time you do; I will eat in the refectory as you do, and so on for the rest. But one thing bothers me and that is that I'll never be able to clean my own shoes. I sincerely hope I can manage everything else, but on that point, I admit my weakness. Give orders to have someone clean my shoes and return them to me every morning.=

AThe Prior, who had the spirit of God and clearly foresaw that Blessed Jean wouldn't remain in that state of mind very long, said, >By all means, Monsieur, that's a mere trifle; I'll give a Brother charge of that, and he won't fail to do it.= And so it was done, and every day the shoes were brought to his room. Since this went on longer than the Prior had expected, he himself picked up the shoes of Blessed Jean, cleaned them, and brought them back every morning. One day the monk saw him and, since he wasn't quite certain who it was, he looked more closely to be sure. He began to think, >What, wretched man! Your Prior is cleaning your shoes; you want to be a monk, but what are your dispositions? You need a valet. You don't know how to clean your own shoes, and your Superior is cleaning them!= In this state of mind he went on his knees before the Prior, entreated him not to do it any more, publicly asked pardon, did penance in private for it, and afterward always cleaned his own shoes. You see by this, Sisters, the force of example.

ABut this Sister is lazy; she doesn't get up with the rest of you! Well, don't say anything to her. But she does nothing; she won't even sweep the room. Then you sweep it. If she doesn't make her bed, you make it. All the work she's supposed to do but doesn=t, you do it; and you'll see that she won't let you do it for long. But, above all, when a Sister criticizes someone, turn to God without saying a word, and you'll see that she'll soon keep silence; for, if there were never any Sisters to listen, there never would be any to complain.

AA fourth means--I'm coming back to it to recommend it to you--is not to discuss your Sisters with your confessors. In the name of God, Sisters, never discuss your disagreements with them; be respectful concerning them. As I=ve told you, that can't be done in confession, and, outside confession, it's slander. Conceal your little differences of opinion as well as you can, except from those who should know about them. Above all, bear one another's burdens in peace.

AThe fifth means to prevent complaints and to help each one to correct herself is, I think, not to reprove one another. I=ve already told you not to reproach the Sister who speaks ill of someone; I'm now going further: never reproach anyone. The Jesuits, who are wise men if there are any wise men in this world, used to correct each other in the early days of their Institute; since they were still committing faults, they decided to try another means, namely, not to give any reproofs, but to inform the Superior about them, and only in the case of a conspicuous fault. They noticed that this brought better results than when they used to admonish one another, so they resolved not to do it any more, and they don=t; so I think that, if we adopt this practice, we'll infallibly see good results.

A >But how can we do that, Monsieur? This Sister is always talking and never keeps silence.= By keeping it yourself at the appointed time and letting her talk.

A >But she does nothing whatsoever; I have all the trouble and responsibility; if I go on like this I'll become ill.= Keep going, do everything she should be doing, and you'll see that she

won’t let you do so for very long.

A >She didn’t make her bed all week long.= Make it for a whole month--for two months, if necessary; before the month is over, you’ll see an improvement. If, however, there is none, don’t stop doing it.

AWe’ll try this means for three months; unless I tell you otherwise, please don’t reprove anyone about anything for three months except by example. In three months we’ll have another conference on this subject, and you can tell us the results. During those three months, take care to examine your conscience on this before dinner and supper. Let each one see whether she has said anything against her Sister, and whether there has been any grumbling. Do that, Sisters, give one another good example, and don’t say a word. Don’t say a word, but don’t act disdainfully, Oh no! certainly not. Still more, don’t scold, for that would be a great imperfection. The instructions you=re given aren’t intended merely to prevent imperfections. I=d never ask you to do your Sister’s duties in order to give her good example if I thought you=d do them grudgingly or fail in cordiality. Oh no! I mean you should invite her to meals at the proper time, converse with her about the practices of your Rule when there’s time to do so, take reading with her, talk to her during meals, encourage her to come to recreation, show her every sort of friendliness and respect, and ask her advice when appropriate. Believe me, Sisters, a Sister would be very little disposed to virtue if, after such an example, she didn’t improve. Be faithful to this practice; always be reserved, cheerful, and in a good mood, even when the pain she causes you makes that difficult because, Sisters, she won’t see you behaving like that very long before she begins to do even more than you=d desire.

AThe sixth and last means are confession and Holy Communion. These are great means, Sisters; they’ll draw down on you without fail graces sufficient to help you to bear with and excuse the faults of others and to correct yourselves. Familiarize yourselves with them, Sisters, in the name of God. Have you noticed that you have fallen? Have recourse to holy confession, go to Holy Communion every time God in His goodness allows it. >But I have no inclination for it.= Never mind! don’t stop going. It’s God who’s calling you. There’s no remedy more efficacious against the illnesses of our souls. That’s where we must go to fortify ourselves; that’s where we must go to tell our troubles, for there we’ll find the True Physician who knows the best remedies. That’s where we must go to study love, forbearance, graciousness, good example to our neighbor, and all the other virtues we need. Go then, dear Sisters, when Jesus Christ calls you there, and don’t consider whether you=re attracted there by a perceptible fervor because your enemy will strive with all his might to prevent you from approaching them, in order to deprive you of the graces God wants to impart to you to help you to begin to practice the divine virtues of His Son. All together let’s ask Him for those virtues of charity and forbearance, which He practiced during His lifetime and which I’m now going to ask Him for you.

AMy Lord and my God, Jesus Christ my Savior, the most amiable and loving of all men, You who practiced charity and forbearance incomparably more than all people together, You who received the most wrongs and insults and had the least resentment, please listen to the very humble prayer we offer You, that You may be pleased to impart to the Company the spirit of charity with which You were aflame, and the spirit of gentleness and forbearance You had for Your enemies, so that, by the practice of these virtues, the eternal plans of the adorable Will of God for it may be fulfilled, and it may glorify God by imitating You and, by its example, win souls to Your service. Above all else, my God, may this Company, by mutual forbearance, be pleasing to You. My God, do not consider the voice of the sinner who speaks to You, but look at

the hearts of our poor Sisters, present and absent, who desire this and who ask You for it through my lips. My God, I ask you to please grant them to the Company through Your most Holy Mother, through all the Saints who glorify You in heaven and by all those living on earth, through the Guardian Angels of our poor Sisters, and by their desire to be faithful to Your graces. My God, I hope You will grant me this grace, wretched sinner that I am, although I have often acted contrary to the precepts You have given me and the inspirations You have sent me for the practice of these virtues. Filled with confidence in Your infinite mercy, I will not fail to pronounce the words of blessing on this Company, and, at the same time I utter them, I hope that You will fill their hearts with Your spirit of charity. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

29. - RELATIONS AMONG THE SISTERS AND WITH PERSONS<R> OUTSIDE THE COMPANY

February 2 [1647][1]

Conference of February 2 on the reasons why Sister Servants should carry out faithfully their duties toward priests, the Ladies of their parishes, and their Sister companions; [2] also, the relations of Sister companions with their Sister Servants and with one another, and what they should do to perform their duties well in every respect.

After reading the title of the conference, Most Honored Father began to speak in almost the following words: ASisters, this is a very important topic, much more important than I can express. We=re doing today what Saint Paul did in his day when, writing to the Christians of the early Church, he taught them how the husband should live with his wife, the father with his child, the master with his servants, and servants, both men and women, with their masters and mistresses. So, Sisters, this conference is to teach you how you should act with your confessors in the parishes where you are living, with those who are assigned to visit the sick whom you serve, with the Ladies who are Officers of the Charity and, lastly, how you should act with one another, that is, the Sister Servant with her Sister, and vice versa. And if it pleases the Divine Goodness to bless what will be said about it, as I am hoping, you will greatly benefit from it.

AI think it would be well to add the physician to the list; however, as this subject is very broad and would require not just one conference--actually, each point would merit more than one--I'm of the opinion that, taking this into account, together with the fact that it's getting late and some of you have come from a distance, it would be well to deal with only one point today, namely, how you should act with regard to the priests who visit the sick. And we'll continue this topic at the next conference.

ASister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this subject?@ The Sister said that it was necessary to treat priests with the utmost respect, the Ladies with the greatest submission, and one's Sister with the greatest cordiality, but it sometimes happened that a Sister was of one opinion and her Sister Servant was of another, and a slight altercation sometimes resulted from this disagreement. She entreated Most Honored Father to do her the charity of telling her what to do in such circumstances.

AYes, Sister, certainly,@ he replied. AI'll give an answer both for you personally and for all our Sisters here present, as well as for those who are absent; someone can tell them because this can happen to anyone. I'll begin where I should end, which is how Sisters are to live with one another. So, Sisters, when these differences of opinion arise, the Sister should yield to the Sister Servant, unless she informs Mademoiselle or the Superior[3] of the matter. That's what is done in well-regulated Communities.

ASuperiors or Superioresses have their Councillors, to whom they submit matters. When

they=ve heard their opinions, they follow them if they think it well to do so, for a Superior or Superioress has the authority to act contrary sometimes to the advice of their Councillors. If they think it more advisable to act otherwise they may say, >We'll think about this again,= and, if they judge it necessary, they may act contrary to what they have been advised to do. At the time of the visitation, the Officers may tell the Visitor that, on a certain day, the Superioress asked their advice on a particular matter, and they agreed for such and such a reason that the thing should be done, but that it wasn't done; and the Visitor will make enquiries and order what he thinks advisable.

AThis may happen when you are together, Sisters. If a Sister doesn't agree with what her Sister Servant proposes to her, she's at liberty to give her reasons once or twice; but, if the Sister Servant doesn't accept them, then all she can do is submit. If the house is conveniently located and the matter isn't urgent, I certainly think the Sister Servant shouldn't proceed any further until she has spoken with Mlle Le Gras or, in her absence, with the Sister Servant here. If this happens in a distant place, it will be well for her to write to Mademoiselle as soon as possible and say, >This matter came up; a Sister here was of such and such an opinion and I was of another. I=ve acted according to my way of thinking; please let me know if I did the right thing.= It seems to me that this is what should be done, Sisters.

ANow, while we=re on this topic, I still want to tell you how a Sister and her Sister Servant should get along with one another. In the first place, I think that to do this well they should live in such a way that no one ever knows which one is the Sister companion and which is the Sister Servant. The latter should never seek to be first, to be better dressed, or to take the best place. They should always go just as they happen to come; in that way it will sometimes be one, sometimes the other, who is first, and outsiders will never know which one is in charge.

AThey must also have great respect for one another. Therefore, the Sister Servant must be convinced that her Sister is much better than herself, and far more capable of occupying the position she holds. That, Sisters, should be our aim, namely, always to consider that someone else is worth much more than we are. And no truly good person thinks otherwise; no, a man isn't really a good man unless he thinks he's the most wicked man alive and that every other person is more worthy than he is. Believe me, Sisters, if we don't think this of ourselves, we=re in great danger. I tell you, Sisters, that as soon as a Sister imagines that she's more important than her Sister, she's no longer anything in the sight of God; and, as imperfect as her Sister may be, she's better than she is. If anyone thinks she has a better presence, a nicer manner, a sharper mind, that's the spirit of pride slipping into her, the spirit of the devil, and the spirit of hell because pride is the cause of hell.

ANever say, >This Sister is troublesome and bad-tempered; she has no virtue.= When such a thought crosses your mind, Sisters, look at yourselves and you'll soon say, >*Mon Dieu*, she's far better than I am, who can't do anything worthwhile. All I do is spoil things; I don't know how people can stand me.= That's the point we have to reach, Sisters. It's not enough to say this, you must really believe it for, I repeat, it's impossible for a good man to look at himself before God and not see that he's the most wicked man alive. So, Sisters, the Sister Servant must always think that her Sister is better than she is and far more qualified to occupy the position she holds. To do things right, there isn't a single Sister Servant who shouldn't ask permission at least every six months to be relieved of her office. Alas! I know--maybe I shouldn't tell you this--as I said, I know the Superior of a poor little Company, the least and most useless in the Church, who never fails to write at least once a year to ask to be relieved of his office. >Father,= he says, >in the

name of God, please relieve me. What do you think you=re doing with me in this job? I spoil everything and am doing nothing.=

ANow, Sisters, those who are in Paris can ask Mlle Le Gras, the Sister Servant here, or the Superior to relieve them, and those living at a distance have to ask in writing, but do it sincerely and without pretense, and recognize honestly that they=re spoiling everything. Furthermore, they should never give orders to their Sisters but always be very gentle in speaking to them, so that it doesn't suggest the sort of person who wants to decide everything herself, like someone who would say, >Do that, go there, come here.= That's devilish language, Sisters; that's what the demons do. Beware of that. May there never be a Daughter of Charity who speaks that way! God preserve us! When you=d like a Sister to do something, say to her, >Sister, would you be kind enough to do that?= And add, >For the love of Our Lord.= In this way she'll have the merit of obedience, and of obedience for the love of Our Lord. So, when you want something, Sisters, please say, >Sister, I'm asking you to do this for the love of Our Lord.= And no one should be able to tell from the way you act which of you is the Sister Servant and which is the companion.

AWhen you have occasion to speak, it's up to the Sister Servant to take the initiative. Not that the other Sister may not speak also; but, just as when one is walking with a prominent person, one should remain a step to the rear, in like manner, when the Sister is with her Sister Servant, she may indeed speak at times; but once she has said something, she should let her Sister Servant continue the conversation. And this must be done imperceptibly, so that no one notices it. That's how you should act with one another, Sisters.

ALet's say something now about priests. Sisters, how well our Sisters spoke when they said that they should treat them with great respect! With as much respect as though there's no one in the world to whom such great respect is due! To convince yourselves of this, reflect that they are persons who have the power to cause bread to be changed into the Body of the Son of God; that by their ministry you=re restored to God's grace; that from an enemy of God they make you His child; that God gives them authority for what they do with regard to sinners; and that they have the power to snatch a soul from the hands of the devil and restore it to God. Sisters, you can never honor them too much. That's why you should never speak to them except with very great reserve, and hardly dare to raise your eyes in their presence. Respect their holiness--if they are holy--and if, to your knowledge, they are not, respect the holiness of their ministry and the place they hold in the Church of God.

AWhen you speak to them about the needs of a sick person, do so briefly and succinctly, and never at their residences. Oh no, Sisters, never! it's better to wait for them at the church. If there's a pressing need--I mean something really urgent--and you can't put it off, then you may go there, but never alone. Alas! and what would an unaccompanied Sister be doing in the residence of a priest? What would people say? Oh no! that must absolutely not be done. If the case is urgent, you may take a Sister with you, tell her why you=re going, and leave immediately afterward. If the priest should want to keep you to discuss something else, don't do it. You may, however, reply once or twice, but if he wants to detain you any longer after that, say, >Please excuse me, Monsieur; I have some business to take care of; I'm rather in a hurry.= For you see, Sisters, although these are men who, by the holiness of their ministry and the sacred character they bear, are raised far above the rest of people, it could nevertheless happen with some of them that, if you speak to them at length and on unnecessary matters, they might continue to listen, and then both of you would be wasting your time. So you should always deal with them very seriously and briefly.

AWith regard to the Ladies you must obey all their orders, keep them fully informed about the patients, take their orders for everything and follow them most exactly, never changing anything of what they tell you to do, and recognize that it's up to them to give the orders and for you to obey. But I have a very important piece of advice to give you: don't put yourselves on a par with them, nor treat them as your companions, nor encroach on their authority by giving orders on your own, for you=d spoil everything, Sisters; you=d destroy the Charity; they wouldn't want to have anything more to do with you, and would pull out of everything. They provide support for the Confraternity from their own resources; you give only your time, which would be of no use without their funding. They are like the head of a body and you=re only the feet. What would it be like if the feet wanted to give orders and to ignore the head whenever they felt like it! That would be quite ridiculous because it's the distinctive feature of the head to command and up to the feet to move to where the head orders them to go. Now, Sisters, if you want to see the Charity flourish and the poor continue to be assisted, you must act this way with regard to the Ladies; otherwise they'll grow weary of it. So then, Sisters, try to work with all your might at the practice of the three points we mentioned, which are great love, great cordiality, and great esteem for one another; great respect and perfect reserve toward priests; great dependence, submission, and obedience regarding the Ladies; perfect charity for the poor persons you serve, and total submission to all for the love of God.

AWith all my heart I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who willed to come on earth to submit himself not only to His parents but to the most wicked of all men and to His enemies; who did not come to earth to do His own Will but that of His Father; who did not come to command but to obey; I ask Him, I repeat, to put into your hearts the true desire for perfect obedience, the true spirit of obedience that He himself had, and to give you His true Spirit to act with everyone and in all matters in accordance with His holy and divine Will. I make this prayer to the Eternal Father through the Son, to the Son through His holy Mother, and to the entire Blessed Trinity through our poor Sisters now in heaven. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

30. - THE RULES

May 30, 1647

ASisters, the subject of the present conference is the importance of keeping your Rules well, the benefit and help that come from their observance, and the harm that is caused by growing slack in them. This talk is divided into three parts. I just told you the first one; the second deals with the faults most often committed and into which we most easily allow ourselves to lapse; and the third, the means to remedy the faults that are noted. May it please the Divine Goodness to grant all of us, such as we are, the grace to draw good results from this talk and get some help from it! Sister, would you please tell us your thoughts?@

The Sister then replied that it was very necessary to keep even the most insignificant of her Rules because, if nature begins to grow lax, it will soon demand more. If we neglect one thing today, we'll neglect another tomorrow.

AWhat Sister means to say is very remarkable,@ said Most Honored Father; Afor it's a ruse of nature that seeks its own ease. For example, if you get up late today, tomorrow your body will feel heavy because it will not have had as much rest. If today you have a fling and go for a walk or pay some visits, tomorrow your mind and body will be unwilling to subject themselves to the confines of the limitations of the Rule. That's why, Sisters, there's nothing like getting into the habit of doing what has to be done, if you want to find nothing difficult. Once the body has been

disciplined, it no longer finds anything painful and feels fit. Take, for instance, a poor soldier who has served in the army for a long time, badly fed, sleeping on straw--and quite happy if he has any! When he returns home and has had a little more rest in a more comfortable bed, he becomes ill. And that, Sisters, is why Sister is quite right in saying that, if today we do only a little, tomorrow we'll want to do even less. Go on, Sister.@ The Sister added that, to enter into the practice of the Rules, she thought it would be good for her to set out every day to be faithful to them, and in the evening to examine her conscience to see where she had failed.

AThat is, Sister, every morning you=d say to yourself, >I want to keep my Rules today (don't talk about tomorrow); with God's help, I won't fail in anything.= In the evening, and even sometimes during the day, at the particular or general examination of conscience, you=d see where you failed in them. I think that's what you meant to say, Sister, when you spoke about doing penance for them, for that's necessary. If you did fail, you should punish yourself, either by reciting a decade of the rosary, or kissing the floor, or even taking the discipline. If you follow this advice, you'll soon notice some progress in the observance of your Rules. When the body sees itself treated like that, it soon submits. God bless you, Sister!

AAnd would you please tell us what you thought, Sister?@

AI thought that, from the time we enter the Motherhouse, we=re obliged to practice the Rules, since we=ve promised God to live in conformity with them and with the spirit of the Community, and to fail in them would be a lack of fidelity to God.@

AThat's so true! It would be a lack of fidelity to God; right you are, Sister, it would be a lack of fidelity to God! Please continue.@

The Sister added that, to be a true Daughter of Charity, it's not enough to bear the name and wear the attire, we have to do its works; otherwise, we=d give bad example to the whole Company, and that would be very harmful to it. On the second point, she said that the most usual faults are the negligence and little love with which we carry out our ministry; the lack of cordiality, forbearance, and deference to the judgment of our Sisters, from which failures in charity among ourselves usually result; and lastly, failures in silence at the appointed times. On the third point, she noted that one good means was to have a high esteem of the Rules and great love for them because they=re the way by which we'll reach heaven; and to be careful not to do anything that could give bad example to our Sisters.

Another Sister remarked that there was no better means of pleasing God and advancing in virtue than the practice of the Rules, that we often failed in this by talking about the failings of others, and that this fault could be corrected by the practice of the presence of God.

Another Sister gave as reasons for the observance of our Rules that there's nothing in them that doesn't tend to the glory of God, that Our Lord willed to fulfill faithfully on earth all that the prophets had said of Him, without omitting a single occasion to do so, and that the Rules prescribed in Communities are lights God has given to Superiors to be proclaimed to those men and women who are willing to embrace them and to be faithful to them. On the second point, one of the principal faults is that we don't reflect sufficiently on the excellence of our Rules; consequently, we underestimate their value and gradually allow ourselves to neglect them. The remedy is to be energized by the two motives of the first point, which are that we'll give glory to God and will also please Him.

Another Sister stated as one reason that, having been called to our present situation by the Will of God, we must believe that it's a sure road to attain the perfection He wants of us. The most generalized fault, and the source of many individual ones, is not to have sufficient esteem

for our Rules, to convince ourselves that we can easily be dispensed from them at the slightest obstacle that presents itself. The remedy for this is to have a high esteem for them and to give ourselves to God anew to begin to observe them more faithfully.

Another Sister said that if we keep our Rules our Rules will keep us, that a fairly common fault is a lack of gentleness and compassion toward the sick, and that a good remedy is to motivate ourselves at the beginning of our actions to do them for the love of God.

Several other Sisters spoke but, since most of them had not written anything down, we couldn't retain everything. Mademoiselle, requested by Most Honored Father to say what she had thought, handed in her notes which contained the following:

One reason is the recognition of our obligations to God, who knows we need Rules for our salvation and has given us this means of cooperating in this with His grace. Another is that, if the Rules are not observed in Companies, not merely in what they recommend but also in what they forbid, there will be constant disorder and disunion, and God will be more dishonored than glorified.

The most common faults are not making the effort to apply ourselves to meditation; lacking sufficient esteem for our Rules; convincing ourselves that they=re not obligatory; being unwilling to have our faults mentioned to our Superiors; taking the liberty to discuss the faults of others, along with our own troubles and petty discontents; and murmuring often against Superiors.

As means there are the following: to do those things contrary to the aforementioned; to keep ourselves informed frequently of what is according to our Rules; to tell our Superiors, as soon as possible, the faults we have committed against them; to give ourselves daily to God to observe them; to ask His grace to do so and, for that purpose, to pray to the Blessed Virgin and our Guardian Angel.

After expressing his approval of all that had been said for the motives and for the remarks and means, Most Honored Father began his talk in almost the following words: AI thank God, dear Sisters, for the inspirations He has given you on this topic; from the look on your faces it is apparent that, by His mercy, your hearts have been touched by them. I seem to read in them the desire to make serious efforts to practice your Rules faithfully. I see something extraordinary in your behavior. I thank God for this with all my heart and beseech His Goodness to lead us to a true knowledge of the glory it will render Him!

ADo you know a powerful motive for embracing your Rules, Sisters? You said it yourselves, namely, that God inspired Superiors to give them to you. You said it was God who had made them. It's not you who said this, Sisters, it's Saint Paul. >Everything good= says this great saint, >comes from God=.[1] Nothing is done for God unless He himself does it. Now, Sisters, what work is more the work of God than yours? Who else would have known how to establish it as He did? What could even God himself have done to make it better?

First, He has chosen poor young women. If He had chosen rich ones, would they have done what the former have done? Would they have served the sick in the most lowly and painful forms of service? Would they have carried a big pot or a basket to market to purchase provisions? And although, by God's grace, there are at present among you some women of fairly high rank, it's easy to believe that they might not have done such things in the beginning.

AAfter that, could God do anything better than to establish among you the frugality that's practiced here? And isn't that a sign that it's God? If you had been well fed and provided with fine foods, alas! Sisters, nature, which seeks her own ease, would scarcely be concerned with

going to the assistance of others; you would have begun to idle about and be well fed, and then people wouldn't have wanted you; for, since you weren't allowed to spend much money, so as not to be a burden on the places that were asking for you, it was absolutely essential for you to lead this frugal sort of life, which is a very sure sign that your work is the work of God.

AAnd isn't this also seen quite clearly in its beginnings and development? Saint Augustine tells us that one sign by which God's works may be recognized is that they come about by themselves. They go along in such a way that they=re imperceptible, and, in the end, the thing is done, and no one can say how. That's how it is with your establishment, dear Sisters, for it can't be said how it came into existence, nor who made it, if not God. Ask Mlle Le Gras if she ever thought of it. Nothing was farther from her mind! As for me, I can tell you before God that I never thought of it. So, who did, Monsieur? It was God, who knew full well what He wanted to do, Sisters. Therefore, love the way He has guided your Company and hold fast to the Spirit He has put into it and the practice of the Rules He has introduced, which contain in themselves the most certain means for living as true Christian women. Not only that, but, observed in the Spirit of God, they'll help you to reach the heights of religious piety and the most solid virtue that can be practiced in Christendom.

AFirst, they=re in conformity with the Gospel. They contain all that's most perfect in what Our Lord has taught us, the entire path He has indicated for attaining the kingdom of God. They mark it out for you; I=d make this clear to you in everything, if I weren't pressed for time, but I'll point out to you just two or three articles.

AThe first evangelical counsel teaches poverty; Our Lord begins with that when He teaches the way of perfection to those who wish to follow Him. By the mercy of God, Sisters, that's where you begin because, when you enter here, you possess nothing; if you do have anything, you give it up, according to the evangelical precept. At the Motherhouse, you have poverty in all things: you=re dressed in the poorest fabrics,--no headdress is as simple as yours--the frugality I just mentioned to you is a sign of God's guidance of your work, evident in what you eat and drink, and, by His grace, everything else is characterized by very great poverty.

AFor your consolation, Sisters, I can tell you that nothing is more holy, nor more perfect in the Gospel maxims than what is prescribed for you by the Rules God has given you and which, by God's grace, all of you observe.

AIn addition to poverty, Our Lord commands us to leave self; isn't that what you do in coming to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Sisters? For, in all the Orders in the Church of God, who has to renounce self as completely and continually as you do? I, for one, certainly don't know of any. To surrender your own will as soon as you come here, never to entertain a thought of being able to satisfy yourselves in any respect, to live in entire and constant dependence on the will of Superiors to go to a place, to remain, to hold this or that office--that's total self-renunciation.

AIn the third place, Our Lord counsels disregard of self and, by His infinite mercy, that's what you=re seeking. Is there anything more despicable in the eyes of the world than a poor Daughter of Charity? Don't the holy Rules that the Divine Goodness has been pleased to give you teach you to learn this disregard of self when they dictate that you are to submit your judgment, to have always a high opinion of your Sister, and to believe that you=re the cause of what is done poorly?

AWhat perfection is contained in them, Sisters, and how certain you should feel that they=ve been given to you from the hand of God, since they=re filled with the holiest practices that Jesus

Christ taught those who wanted to follow Him, and which the Apostles and all the saints have practiced! One of you said--and it's so true--that it's very difficult to persevere in your vocation when you neglect your Rules. Sisters, it's God who caused you to speak like that, for, not only is it difficult, I=d go further and say it's impossible. For how can a person make herself worthy of the grace of perseverance, if she despises her Rules? And not to observe them is certainly to despise them. You also said that, if you keep them, they'll keep you. From what do you think they'll keep you, Sisters? They'll keep you from being unfaithful to God because no one has ever seen a person, attached to the observance of her Rules, lose her vocation. If she commits other faults, God gives her grace to begin over again.

AThat's a powerful motive, Sisters, and a strong reason to incite you to be exact and careful in the practice of your Rules. You yourselves have said so, not I. But I'm coming back to it to emphasize its importance, which is so great that, if well taken, is a question of eternal salvation; for, although you=re not obliged to practice your Rules under pain of sin, nevertheless it's true that, since you=re in the Company, you=re bound to observe them. They=re a route God has traced out for you; they=re the paths by which He wants to lead you and, if you wander away from them, believe me, dear Sisters, you=re in great danger of going astray.

AIn the fifth place, the practice of the Rules is both meritorious and satisfactory for those who have embraced them. Every sin deserves punishment, either in this world or in the next. Now, if, in order to make amends for the time she has lost, a person gives herself truly and wholeheartedly to God in a way of life that tends to His glory, all her observances make satisfaction to Him for the punishments due to the sins she has committed. Therefore, she can apply to the forgiveness of her past sins everything her Rules order her to do. Well, Sisters, who among us will neglect such an opportunity? Who hasn't been sullied by vanity? How many lies, slanders, or bad thoughts, and how many other faults you can't remember, for which our Rules are sweet penance for us?

AThey=re also meritorious in themselves because, while satisfying for past sins, they acquire new merit of such a nature that nothing else is needed to make a person holy, if she has been faithful to them. I saw a Pope, Clement VIII, a very holy man, so holy that even heretics used to say, >Pope Clement is a saint.= He was so touched by God and had the gift of tears in such abundance that, when he went up what is called the Holy Stairs,[2] he bathed it in his tears. Now, this holy man said, >Bring me a member of a religious Order, just a girl or a woman who has persevered in obedience to her Rules, give me sufficient proof of this, and I won't ask for any other evidence of her sanctity; I'll canonize her. I don't want any raising of the dead to life; I don't want any cures or other miracles, but simply the fact that she has kept her Rules. I'll have her name inscribed in the calendar and a feast proclaimed.=

AThis holy person, who was a Pope of our own day, respected the observance of Rules. From this you see, dear Sisters, the merit they have in the sight of God and to what perfection of life they lead the souls who are exact to them, since this holy man asked for no other testimony of sanctity for the canonization of a soul than fidelity to Rule. Isn't that something to inspire you to love them, to have great respect for them, and never to fail in them? Doesn't it suffice to reflect that you are doing God's Will in order to receive satisfaction? Is there any more powerful motive? Can a soul who desires to please God want anything else than to do God's Will? And in doing what is prescribed by your Rules, Sisters, you=re just as sure of doing God's Will as if He had told you so with His own lips. You couldn't be more certain. Since your Rules come from Him, your Company comes from Him, and He has called you to it to do there what He has

ordained for all the others. May God be blessed, Sisters, and let's give ourselves to Him to do always His most holy Will!

ASo then, dear Sisters, those are some motives to spur you on to the love, esteem, and fidelity you owe to your Rules. The first is that your work is the work of God; the second, that your Rules contain the means of helping you make your way to Christian perfection; the third, that they=re in conformity with the Gospel and composed of what is clearest in it to help the soul advance toward virtue; that it's difficult to persevere in your vocation if your Rules are neglected; that they=re meritorious and atoning; and that, were there no other motive than to think you=re doing the Will of God, that motive would be powerful enough to oblige us never to deviate from them.

AIt now remains to give some means to do so; *in nomine Domini*. Among all those with which God has inspired you, Sisters, I find one in particular that's wonderfully efficacious, namely, to ask God's grace for that, but to ask it in the right way--I mean with the intention of corresponding with grace to the utmost of our ability and to be faithful in the smallest circumstances because, as you have remarked, whoever is faithful in small things, will be faithful in great ones. Now, don't think that there's anything of slight importance in the Rules, Sisters, because everything pertaining to the glory of God is sacred and noble, and we mustn't neglect to do anything that may be in our power to do. Ask God for this every morning, throughout the day, and at night, and never stop asking for it.

A >But, Monsieur= someone will object, >that's very easy to say, but it's very hard to be able to do everything in the way we=re told to do it. A thousand circumstances arise preventing us from doing, at specific times, what is being done at the Motherhouse.= Sisters, for the consolation of those in difficult ministries, let me say that there must be no delay in what concerns the service of the poor. If, at the time of your morning prayer, you have to take medicine to someone, then go there with your mind at rest; after an act of resignation to the holy Will of God, offer Him what you=re going to do, unite your intention with the prayer being made at the Motherhouse or elsewhere, and go about your business with no anxiety.

AIf, on your return, you=re free to spend a little time in meditation or spiritual reading, very well! But, if you can't do it, don't become upset, nor think you=ve failed, for it's not lost when you leave it for a legitimate reason. And if there is ever a legitimate reason, dear Sisters, it's the service of the neighbor. To leave God for God is not leaving God at all, that is, to leave one work of God to do another, either of greater obligation or of greater merit. You leave prayer or spiritual reading or you break the Rule of silence in order to help a poor person. Keep in mind, Sisters, that doing all this is to serve Him. What a consolation for a good Daughter of Charity to think, >I'm going to help my sick poor, but God will accept this in place of the prayer I should be making just now,= and let her go off cheerfully to wherever God is calling her.

AWhen Moses read to the people of Israel the Law God had given him on tablets of stone, he asked them, >Will you do all this?= And they raised their voices unanimously, saying, >We can't do it of ourselves, but we will ask it of God.= The same holds true of your Rules, Sisters. Of yourselves you can't observe them exactly but you must ask this of God.

AMy Lord Jesus Christ, it's true that, of ourselves, we=re poor creatures capable only of offending Your Divine Majesty and dishonoring by our weaknesses the choice that You, in Your goodness, have made of us to serve You in the way of life to which You have called us. Yet, trusting in that same divine goodness and mercy, with our whole heart we ask Your grace for all of us--both those who are now members of our Company, and those who will be--to observe the

Rules You willed to give us, in the way you carried out the most holy Will of Your Eternal Father in this world and to die rather than deliberately commit a single act of infidelity. Should we be so weak as to allow ourselves to fall, stretch out Your helping hand to us in Your immense charity to raise us up from our falls. All of us, with one accord, ask this of You, my God, and declare that we would rather die than fail in a single iota of what You want of us. May it please your Divine Goodness to grant us sufficient grace to accomplish it with the perfection You want! That, dear Sisters, is the prayer I offer to God for you with all my heart. I entreat Him to respond favorably to your desire for this. If you ask Him often for the grace to carry out your Rules and give yourselves to Him to practice them, He'll never allow you to become unfaithful.

AAnother means--and a very effective one, Sisters--is to be willing to be admonished for the faults you commit against your Rules; to consent to your Superiors being informed of them and to their reproving you for them; to accept this in a spirit of meekness; to be glad that they do this act of charity for you; to ask the Sister with whom you live to notify Mademoiselle and to tell me personally, but doing it frankly and sincerely: >*Mon Dieu!* Sister, for the love of God please inform M. Vincent and Mademoiselle of the faults you see me commit.=

AYou can't imagine how useful this is, Sisters; for alas! we see only the slightest part of our faults, we even lose sight of sins that incur damnation, as happened to David after he had Uriah put to death. He gave it no thought so God sent him a prophet to admonish him of his sin, and he came to his senses at once. >What!= said he, >alas, I have committed that sin!=[3] And the realization remained so strongly imprinted on his soul that from then on he said daily, >Lord, forgive me my sins.= And when Saint Peter denied Our Lord, he didn't think he had done wrong. But from the day he was admonished for it, he wept constantly, recognizing the enormity of his sin.

ABut do you think there are any persons in your Company and among you, Sisters, who are so disposed to be admonished of their faults and are willing that Superiors be told of them? By the mercy of God, there are some--yes, there are; I'm well aware of this--who=d like all their faults to be known, and I know some who are glad to be reminded of their faults and to have them mentioned to Superiors. I'll go even further, Sisters, for I'm willing to believe that you=re all disposed to be admonished, not only in private but in public as well.

AConsider the mercies of God on a member of your Company, Sisters--I won't mention her name, at least not just now. From the rural area, where she was staying, she wrote a letter to her Sister who had come to Paris, and this is what she said, >My very dear Sister, I greet you at the foot of the cross of our dear Savior suffering for us. I'm writing you this note to ask you to do me the great favor of mentioning all my faults to Mademoiselle, without keeping from her a single one of them. This would be the greatest proof of love you could ever show me; for, if you love me, you'll also love my perfection and, in that case, you won't refuse me what will contribute so greatly to it. And to oblige you more strongly to do what I'm asking of you, I'm sending you a little picture of the Blessed Virgin to urge you, by the merits of her Son Jesus Christ, not to refuse me such a just request. For, dear Sister, you know the good someone did you when she did the same for you. So then, please believe me when I say that, with God's help, this will be beneficial to me. Hoping for it from your charity, I remain forever, in the love of our dear Savior, your very humble servant, Sister. . . .=

AThose, Sisters, are the sentiments of one among you. But I won't mention her name, at least not at present. What do you say to that, Sisters? If she were requesting something that would be very advantageous to her, can she ask for it more insistently than she does when she begs to have

her faults mentioned to others? >And to oblige you to do so,= she says, >I'm sending you a picture of the Blessed Virgin to urge you to do so by the merits of her Son.= Note that: to give someone a gift to oblige her to mention her faults, and to make a gift of a picture of the Blessed Virgin, which was perhaps very precious to her so that, if the Sister should forget, she might be reminded by the sight of it. God bless her! Believe me, Sisters, when we=re faithful to grace, it works wonders in our souls. I=ve seen persons reach the stage where they wanted everyone to know their faults. I was hearing the confession of a poor woman in the country; she spoke so loudly that everyone could hear what she was saying. In vain I said to her, >My daughter, lower your voice, people can hear you.= >It doesn't matter, Monsieur,= she replied, >I want everyone to know that I=ve been so wretched as to do all that evil.= It was to a poor country woman that God gave those sentiments. I also knew a poor man who said to me after his confession, >Monsieur, if you would allow me, I=d go through the country proclaiming my sins aloud so that everyone would know me for what I really am.=

AThose are some of the effects of grace on souls who don't resist it, Sisters. Believe me, you have to reach that point. Anyone who wants to advance in virtue must be willing to have her faults made known. She should mention them herself and be glad that others reveal them. When you come home, don't fail to say how you=ve failed against your Rules. If your Sister gets here before you, ask her to tell Mademoiselle where she has seen you fail. If you can't see Mademoiselle, tell Sister Jeanne, Sister Anne, or Sister X; please mention it, and do so without fail.

AThose, Sisters, are some means we=ve given you; they are motives that will help you to observe your Rules. But here's still another, Sisters, which God is sending you. Up to the present, you=ve worked on your own, with no other obligation in relation to God except to carry out the order prescribed for you and in the way of life laid down for you. Up to the present, you haven't been a body independent of the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity; but now, Sisters, God wills that you form a special body which, however, without being separated from that of the Ladies, will still have its particular functions and spiritual exercises. Until now you=ve worked with no other obligation; now God wants to bind you more closely by the approval He has permitted the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Archbishop of Paris to give to your Rules and your way of life.[4] This is the petition presented to him; here are the Rules, then here's the approval. I'll read them for you one after the other.@

His Charity was kind enough to do just that, although there were many pages to read. The first article of the Rule states that the Company is composed of widows and unmarried women, who will elect, by a plurality of votes, one among them to be Superioress for a period of three years; she may continue in that office for a further three years, but not beyond. M. Vincent said this was understood to be after God had called to himself Mademoiselle, who thereupon knelt down and begged him to begin it right now. AYour Sisters and I, Mademoiselle, have to ask God to give you many more years of life,@ he replied. AIt's God's usual method of acting to preserve by extraordinary means those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His works; and if you think about it, Mademoiselle, you really haven't been alive for more than ten years now--at least in the ordinary way.@

He then continued to read until he reached the article that states, AIt will be a Confraternity and will bear the name of *Confraternity of Sisters of the Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor.*@ Having said this, he exclaimed softly, AWhat a lovely title, Sisters! *Mon Dieu*! What a lovely title and what a beautiful designation! What have you done for God to deserve it? *Servants of the*

Poor is the same as saying *Servants of Jesus Christ*, since He regards what is done to them as done to himself, for they are His members. And what did He do in this world but serve persons who were poor? Preserve this title carefully, dear Sisters, for it's the most beautiful and the most worthwhile one you could have. Do you know--I don't know if I=ve mentioned this to you before--do you know what title the Pope takes? The most beautiful and most venerable of his titles, the one he uses when dealing with the most important affairs, is *Servant of the Servants of God.* We read, >Such and Such--Clement, Urban, or Innocent--at this time Servant of the Servants of God.= You also, Sisters, may sign your name *Servants of the Poor,* who are the well-beloved of Jesus Christ! When Saint Francis gave his Rule, he took the title of *Minor* which means *little.* If this great patriarch called himself >little,= shouldn't you consider it a great honor to follow him and to call yourselves *Servants of the Poor*?@

Most Honored Father continued to read until he came to the article stating that Sisters maintained at the Motherhouse will be provided for from the meager income of the said house and from the work and savings of the Sisters. ASisters,@ he then added, Ahow beautiful that is: *from your savings*, that is, what you place in reserve by your frugal mode of living; and *from the work of your hands*--manual labor, you see; that means what you do outside the time during which you=re on duty with the sick. In your free time you earn something to contribute to the formation of others, who will afterward carry on the same good work as you are doing. May God bless you, Sisters, and give you grace in abundance!@

M. Vincent continued to read the Rules and paused at the article stating that the Sisters will guard against offending God grievously, especially in what concerns chastity, taking every precaution to preserve it, not allowing men to enter their rooms, and not stopping in the streets to speak with persons of the opposite sex. If they must do so, they will cut short the conversation. ASisters,@ he said, Athat refers to men, to whom you will never stop to talk in the streets, except in extreme necessity. Cut short the conversation. Say what you have to say, as clearly and briefly as possible, and then send them away.@

M. Vincent then went on to read the remaining Rules; when he came to the article on silence, he added, AI urge you to observe this, Sisters. Honor at that time the hidden life of the Son of God. >But that's very difficult, Monsieur,= someone will say, >we have business at that time.= In that case, Sisters, remember what I said to you a little while ago about prayer, that to nurse the sick is to make your prayer. The same holds true of silence; but at least you must observe it faithfully from after reading in the evening and from rising in the morning until the end of prayers. And if you=re very careful of this, nothing can keep you from it. All that's needed is a little care and reflection, but above all a desire to keep the Rule.@

After he had finished reading the Rules, Most Honored Father added, AOur wish has been that what was said of Our Lord might be said of you, Sisters, namely, that He began to do, then to teach.[5] Isn't this what you=ve just heard, Sisters, and what you=re doing already? Is there anything you haven't done? No, by the mercy of God; what you=ve been instructed to do today, you were doing previously. It's true that I had already received orders about this from the late Pope, but you hadn't yet received any specific order. Thousands of years before Our Lord came into the world God had sent Moses, to whom He had given a Law, a figure of the one Our Lord was to bring. The people always observed it. But when Our Lord gave His Law, everyone embraced it. Not that Our Lord abolished the Old Law, because the Commandments contained in it are also in the New, but He perfected it.

ASo now, Sisters, here are Rules, approved by the mercy of God, which establish you as a

Confraternity of Charity separate from the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity, with whom you=ve been associated up to the present. They don't disengage you from that of the Ladies, to whom you=re still subject in all that concerns the service of the sick, but they do make you different in your manner of life, so that, as far as you are concerned, the Confraternity you shared with the Ladies is now only like what the Law of Moses was in regard to that of Jesus Christ. You should consider these Rules as coming to you from the hand of God himself, since they=re given by order of the Archbishop, on whom you depend. How consoled should you not feel, Sisters, to see such an effect of the guidance and Spirit of God on you! Thank Him because you=ve already kept them; thank Him because now you=re even more obliged to observe them and because it has pleased His Divine Goodness to order you to do so and, by that very fact, to give you a testimony and assurance that they=re acceptable to God. May your next Holy Communion be in thanksgiving for this, dear Sisters. Thank Him, all of you, in your Sunday Holy Communion, and I=d like you to do this as well on Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. Let all three Communions be for this intention, and also to thank God for your vocation and to ask Him for new graces for His glory and the accomplishment of His work.

AWhen Moses gave the Law of God to the people of Israel, after seeing how ardently they desired it he said to them, >My people, this Law is given to you on the part of God. If you keep it, I promise you, on behalf of the same God, a thousand blessings on all your works, a blessing when you=re in your homes, a blessing when you leave them, a blessing on your work and on your rest, a blessing on all that you do and don't do; in short, all blessings will abound in and on you. If, instead of keeping it, you disdain it, I promise you the exact opposite of all that I=ve just said; for a curse will be on you in your houses, a curse on you outside them, a curse when you enter and a curse when you leave them, a curse on what you do and a curse on what you don't do; in short, all curses shall settle in and on you.=[6]

AWhat Moses said to the people of God, I say to you, Sisters. You have the Rules that have been sent to you on the part of God. If you observe them faithfully, all the blessings of heaven will be poured out on you: you'll have a blessing on your work and on your rest, a blessing on entering and on going out, a blessing on what you do and on what you don't do; all things will be filled with blessings for you. If--God forbid--anyone did not intend to enter into this plan, I say to her what Moses said to those who wouldn't fulfill the Law he gave them on the part of God, >A curse will be on you in the house and outside the house, on what you do and on what you don't do, etc.=

AI=ve already told you on other occasions, Sisters, that a person who boards a ship for a long voyage must submit to everything that is done on board; if he didn't obey all the laws that are kept on it, he=d be in danger of shipwreck. In the same way, those called by God to live in a holy Community must observe all its Rules. By the mercy of God, Sisters, I think each of you is determined to put them into practice. Don't you all feel this way?@ They all said yes with one voice. And Most Honored Father went on, AWhen Moses gave the Law to the people of God they were all kneeling, as I see you doing now, and I hope that His Mercy will second your desires by enabling you to do what He is asking of you. Do you not give yourselves wholeheartedly to God, Sisters, to live in the observance of your holy Rules?@ Everyone answered yes. AAren't all of you resolved with all your heart to live and die in them?@ he continued. Everyone answered yes. AI implore the sovereign goodness of God,@ he said, Athat it may please Him, by His infinite mercy, to pour forth abundantly on you all sorts of graces and blessings so that you may be able to accomplish perfectly and in all things the good pleasure of His most holy Will in the practice

of your Rules.@ At this point, one or several Sisters asked pardon for the faults they had committed.

AI ask God with all my heart, Sisters, to forgive you your failings. And I, wretched man that I am, don't keep my own Rules, and I ask you to forgive me for this! I'm very guilty in your regard in what concerns your work. Please ask God to have mercy on me. For my part, I'll ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to give you himself His holy blessing, and I won't say the words of it today because the faults I=ve committed in your regard make me unworthy of it. I ask Our Lord to be the one to do it.@ Having said that, he kissed the floor. Seeing this, Mademoiselle and all the Sisters, deeply distressed that he was unwilling to give his blessing, begged him several times to do so with such insistence and importunity that, in the end, he yielded.

APray then that God will not consider my unworthiness nor the sins of which I'm guilty but that, having mercy on me, He will pour forth His blessings on you while I pronounce the words of blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

31. - HOLY COMMUNION

August 18, 1647

ASisters, the subject of this conference is Holy Communion. The first point deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity, like all other Christians, should give themselves to God to receive Communion worthily; that is, Sisters, it deals with the importance of making a worthy Communion because of the benefits that come from it or the evils that ensue. The second point deals with what you think should be done for that purpose; that is, the means each one has recognized as necessary and proper for making a good Communion. We have only one hour, Sisters, and we must try, with the help of God, to make good use of it.

AFor what reasons, Sister, should Daughters of Charity give themselves to God to make a good Communion? What benefit results from a good Communion and what evil from a bad one?@ The Sister replied that, in her opinion, a person who had made a good Communion did everything well. AWhat good thinking, what good thinking! The person who has made a good Communion does everything well! And this is true, for how could a person who has been so happy as to make a good Communion do something wrong? She carries God in her heart; she carries a sweet fragrance everywhere; she does nothing except in view of God and for His love. So, Sisters, rest assured that a Daughter of Charity who has made a good Communion will do everything else well. Her heart is the tabernacle of God--yes, the tabernacle of God. The Daughter of Charity should always be that; she should always be in God and God in her, and in that way she'll never do anything but good.

AAnd what harm, Sister, comes to a person who makes a bad Communion?@ The Sister replied that such a person would lose the merit of all her other Communions and might even lose her vocation. AStop there for a minute, Sister. Our Sister has mentioned two or three great evils, which should be weighed and considered attentively. The person who makes a bad Communion, she says, will lose the fruit and merit of all her past Communions; she'll lose the merit of all those she will subsequently make, if she doesn't do penance; she'll lose all the good she's ever done and could do. All that will count for nothing for her and, worst of all, she'll lose her vocation.

AIsn't that what happened to Judas? Like all the other Apostles, Judas had received Our Lord's grace; he had been called to be an Apostle; he had preached, worked miracles, had the honor of following the Son of God, and had assisted at the institution of the most August Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. He made a bad Communion, and what

followed? He lost his vocation at once, withdrew from the holy company of the Apostles to which he belonged, went and sold his Master and, in the end, damned himself forever.

ASo, our Sister was quite right when she said that a Sister could lose her vocation. And she will do so without fail, for how can she be faithful to her vocation, if she isn't faithful to God? That's not to be expected. The person who does nothing to make herself worthy of the graces and fruits of Holy Communion won't become exact in the practice of her Rules; she'll fall into negligence, then into weariness, and finally into a total loss of the graces she received from God. Watch out for this, Sisters, for we mustn't rely on the first fervor we show; we forget all that; and if the Sister has no concern for the promises she made to creatures, she won't pay the slightest attention to the ones she made to God.

ANow, Sister, what benefit is there for a Daughter of Charity who makes a good Communion?@ The Sister replied that, when someone had made a good Communion, she did everything well; she was more gentle and charitable towards the sick, and gave greater edification to everyone. AWhat an excellent comment: the person who has made a good Communion does everything well! If Elijah,[1] endowed with a twofold spirit, worked such wonders, what will a person do who has God within her, who is filled with God? She won't be acting of herself; she'll be doing the actions of Jesus Christ; she'll look after the sick with the charity of Jesus Christ; she'll have the gentleness of Jesus Christ in her conversation; she'll have the patience of Jesus Christ in her trials; and she'll have the obedience of Jesus Christ. In a word, Sisters, all her actions will no longer be those of a mere creature, they'll be the actions of Jesus Christ.

AIn this way, Sisters, the Daughter of Charity who has made a good Communion does nothing displeasing to God because she does the actions of God himself. The Eternal Father respects His Son in such a person; He considers all the actions of such a person as the actions of His Son. What a grace, Sisters! To be certain of being respected by God, held in consideration by God, loved by God! So, when you see a Sister from the Charity nursing the sick gently, lovingly, and attentively, you may say confidently, >That Sister has made a good Communion.= When you see a Sister who is patient in the midst of difficulties, cheerfully enduring all that may be hard to bear, rest assured that this Sister has made a good Communion and that those virtues aren't ordinary virtues but the virtues of Jesus Christ. Endeavor to imitate the most sacred and August person of Jesus Christ, Sisters, both for His own sake and because He'll make you pleasing to God His Father.

ASince we have very little time left, Sisters, I think that what has already been said about the importance of giving oneself to God in order to make a good Communion will suffice to enlighten you on the advantage and disadvantage of making a good or a bad Communion because, if, as has been said--and it's quite true--a person who has received Communion worthily does everything well, then one who has communicated unworthily does everything badly. What does a person receive who has made a good Holy Communion? She receives Jesus Christ and, with Him, a thousand efficacious graces and blessings to work out her salvation and contribute with Jesus Christ to that of others; and, in the end, she receives eternal life.

AAnd what does the one who makes an unworthy Communion receive? Alas! Sisters, she receives her own condemnation. It's Saint Paul who says so, and it's true, for the world would sooner perish than would the truth of the words spoken by the servants of God, who were instruments of the Holy Spirit. Now this is Sacred Scripture and must not be doubted. >He who receives the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ worthily, in the holy Sacrament of the altar, shall

have life eternal,= says this great Apostle,[2] and the person who receives it unworthily receives his condemnation and will be eternally lost, if he does not do penance.

ASince, then, whoever receives Communion worthily performs actions that aren't ordinary actions but actions of Jesus Christ, the person who makes a bad Communion doubtless performs actions, not of a human person but of the demon, and worse even than those of the demon, if that were possible. Could the devil conceive anything more sacrilegious and abominable than what Judas did after receiving Communion unworthily? To rebel against God after receiving such extraordinary graces! It seems that only the devil is capable of that. And Judas did this after receiving Communion! Abomination of abominations! To desert the side of God, to rebel against Him, to sell and betray Him! Those who abandon their vocation have a great deal to fear and should really consider whether their conduct may not be a punishment for their Communions that were badly made, with no amendment or improvement! I'm not speaking of anyone in particular, but am simply cautioning you that care should be taken not to abuse God's goodness toward us in this holy and most August sacrament. He doesn't chastise us the first time we sin against Him, but let's fear that, if we don't correct these sins, we may end by making a bad Communion, and such an unworthy Communion may draw down on us the chastisement of all our other sins because Judas--I'm going back to that example--had committed other crimes against the Son of God. He had conceived envy in his heart against Him, which had no effect; and as soon as he had received Communion, the devil took possession of his heart and involved him in his abominable undertakings.

A >But, Monsieur,= you will say, >what is an unworthy Communion?= May God preserve us from it, dear Sisters! I hope from His Goodness that not one of you is in the state of mortal sin. But there are so many things to be considered if we=re to make our Communions profitably and to good account that it's well--even though, by the mercy of God, none of us has a conscience in that state--to see what can hinder our progress and whether it isn't some lack of the proper dispositions for Communion, and also to see what we need to do to receive Communion worthily.

ASister, what do you think is necessary to make a good Communion?@ The Sister replied that she thought it was necessary to ask God fervently for the grace to do so. AThat's good, Sister, and that's where we should begin. For who can hope to do a good deed if God doesn't give her the grace to do it? And who of herself can conceive a good thought? According to Saint Paul no living person can do so of himself, Sisters. Who then could prepare herself to make a good Communion if God doesn't give her the grace? Sister was quite right to suggest this means. It's the basis and foundation of all the others; and God will never refuse it to anyone who asks for it properly. God bless you, Sister!

AAnd you, Sister, what other means do you think are necessary to make a good Communion?@ The Sister replied that she thought we should have an ardent desire for it.

AHow right you are, Sister. Consider what she is saying, Sisters; we should have an ardent desire for it--ardent, because God doesn't wish to be desired coldly or lukewarmly, but with all the strength and ardor of our will, in the same way as He desires to communicate himself to us. When He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, He said to His Apostles, *Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum*,[3] which means >I have ardently desired to eat this pasch with you.= Now, since the Son of God, who gives himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, desired this with such an ardent desire--*desiderio desideravi*--isn't it right that the soul who desires to receive Him, and of whom He is the sovereign good, should desire Him with all her heart? Rest assured, Sisters,

that what He said to His Apostles He still says to each one of you. That's why you must try to stir up your desire by some good thought such as >You desire to come to me, my Lord, and who am I? But I, my God, desire with all my heart to go to you, for you are my sovereign good and my last end.= The late Bishop of Geneva used to say that He always celebrated Mass as if it were for the last time, and received Communion as if it were Viaticum. That's an excellent practice and I advise you, as strongly as possible, dear Sisters, to adopt it.

AYour Communion days are regulated clearly enough; you can find out when they are and, beginning on the previous evening, prepare your heart. >My God, I'll receive you tomorrow. Alas! how I wish that my preparation were the same as that of the Most Holy Virgin and of all the saints! I sincerely desire, my God, to have all the love of the Seraphim so that I might give it to you. What shall I do, my God? What shall my understanding say? What shall my memory do? What shall my will give You? O Lord my God, may You yourself put within me all You wish to be there. May this Communion make up for the imperfections of all the others from which, unfortunately, I have not benefitted, and may I be what I would want to be, my God, if this were the last one of my life and I were to die immediately after it!= You might then make an act of contrition for all the sins of your past life, Sisters, a renewed detestation of sin and a resolution to avoid it in future. In this way, God will bless your disposition and won't fail to communicate himself to you and to give you His Spirit to do what He wills of you for life or for death.

AAnd you, Sister, what do you think should be done to make a good Communion?@

ATo benefit from Holy Communion I think we really have to take care to thank God, Monsieur.

AYou=re right, Sister. What we=ve said up to this point has dealt with the preparation, but after Holy Communion it's absolutely necessary to thank God. If a bride gave a cold reception to her husband on their wedding day, to which he had been looking forward for so long and on which He expected to receive greater expressions of affection, how hurt and very sad he would feel! What good reason he would have to complain of the bad treatment of his bride! And if he were of a social status to have done her a great honor by marrying her, how indignant and offended would he not feel? If a friend who had been separated from his friend for a long time ardently desired to see him again, cherished the hope of doing so in his heart, and rejoiced at the thought of this consolation; if, I say, on the day they were reunited, instead of the friend he was promising himself, he found an enemy, ready to plunge a dagger into his heart and take his life, what would become of him? Instead of a bride, that bridegroom would find a shameless woman; and the friend, instead of a friend, would find an enemy. Now, Sisters, this is what Jesus Christ is for souls who have given themselves to Him. He's more a spouse than all the spouses on earth, and in a very different way, for this way is truly heavenly and truly divine. He is more a friend than all the friends in the world since He has given His blood and His life for the salvation of each soul. What will He say then if, having desired with a great desire--*desiderio desideravi*--to unite himself to you, to share with you His graces, merits, and glory; what will He say if you, remaining silent and ungrateful, spurn Him and turn your back on Him? Will He not have good reason to be justly angered and to withdraw all the graces He had bestowed so abundantly on you? This is how vocations are lost, Sisters, and is the reason why the unfortunate Judas was abandoned to the demon, who enticed him. He would have received the remedy against temptation, had he wanted to make use of it; but he spurned it, and you see what happened to him.

AI recall that six or seven years ago the late King Louis XIII was angry for a week or so

because, on his return from a journey, when he had taken the trouble of sending for the Dauphin so he could visit with him, the latter wouldn't look at him (he was only a child) and turned his back on him. The King was angry and rebuked those in charge of the Dauphin. >Had you prepared my son,= he said, >had you explained to him how important it is for him to see me, he would have come into my presence, as he was obliged to do, and manifested joy at my return.= Now, Sisters, if an earthly King is rightly angered because, on his arrival, his son turns his back on him, what will Jesus Christ do, the King of Heaven and earth, compared with whom all the Kings of the earth are as nothing? What will He do, I repeat, should He meet any of you who, not having prepared for His coming by the consideration that He is God and the benefits He brings to the soul, instead of devoting herself entirely to thanking Him, giving Him her heart, offering Him her soul, and abandoning everything for His sake, remains cold and useless? What good reason His Divine Goodness would have to be offended! Please, Sisters, let's be very careful of this for the love we owe to God, the benefit it will bring our souls, and the glory we will give to God, if we don't make ourselves unworthy of the graces He wants to grant us.

AAnd you, Sister, what is necessary to receive Communion well?@

AI think that, if we receive Communion worthily once, Monsieur, that Communion will serve as a preparation for other good Communions and will draw down on us God's grace so as not to make bad ones.@

AThat's really good, Sister. You=re saying that, if we prepare well one time, we'll receive Communion with the intention of being faithful to God and will strive daily to do so because, dear Sisters, that should be our aim, and when, in order to make a good Communion we are careful to thank God, that Communion will be a preparation for the next one, and that one for another; in this way, we'll always draw down on ourselves fresh graces of God and rise to a higher degree of love and perfection.

AAnd what about you, Sister, do you have any other good means?@

AMonsieur, I think that one of the things necessary to dispose us to make a good Communion is to lead a quiet life, like the Blessed Virgin did, not making useless visits or talking too much.@

ASo, Sister, you think that, in order to make a good Communion, you should speak little and not pay visits in the city?@

AThat's my thought, Monsieur.@

AGod bless you, Sister, you=re so right! Is there anything that causes greater dissipation of heart than too much talking, and anything that causes greater harm to recollection and spiritual advancement than useless visits? Sisters, if any of you, under any specious and pious pretext whatsoever--for you wouldn't otherwise do so--has allowed herself to pay visits from which she sees no benefit before God, she should discontinue them. The Most Blessed Virgin would leave the house to provide for the needs of the family and the solace and consolation of her neighbor, but it was always in the presence of God; apart from that, she remained quietly at home, conversing in spirit with God and the angels. Ask her, Sisters, to obtain for you from God this interior recollection by which you'll prepare yourselves for the most holy Communion of the Body and Blood of her Divine Son and will be able to say, >My heart is ready; my God, my heart is ready!=[4]

AAnd you, Sister, what do you think is necessary? Give us some good means for making a worthy Communion.@ The Sister answered that she thought it necessary for us not only to have no attachment to mortal sin but also to rid ourselves of anything depraved we might have, either

in our habits, our will, etc.

AYou see, Sisters, in order to go to Communion frequently it's not enough to have no attachment to mortal sin; you must also rid yourselves of every immoderate attachment, for every immoderate attachment is deceitful. Now, to love a certain Sister ardently and to be attached to her, is an immoderate attachment; to love to be in one place rather than in another, or in this ministry rather than in that, is an immoderate attachment, and we must rid ourselves of them in order to make ourselves worthy of frequent Communion.

AAnd you, Sister, do you have any other means? Tell us briefly what you do when you want to prepare for Holy Communion.@ The Sister replied that she would offer herself entirely to God, saying with Saint Teresa, AMy God, give Yourself entirely to me; I give myself entirely to You,@ and that to benefit from Holy Communion we had to mortify our senses, especially curiosity in regard to seeing and hearing useless things, which occupy our minds and prevent us from being united with God.

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts on those two points?@ Mademoiselle then read some notes on her meditation, which she had written in the following terms: AOn the first point, I thought of two main reasons in which all the others are included: one is fear and the other is love. The precept of the Church that we must receive Communion once a year under pain of mortal sin shows that it's God's absolute Will for us to go to Communion. This threat is probably advising us to receive Communion more often, under pain of losing many graces that would be given to us in Holy Communion. It's also important that we give ourselves to God to receive Communion worthily because, if we don=t, we'll run the risk that the threats addressed both to those who don't go to Communion at all and to those who go unworthily, may be addressed to us to punish us.

AThe other reason we have for giving ourselves to God to make a good Communion is the gratitude we should have for the great love He shows in giving himself to us in Holy Communion; we can do so only by expressing a reciprocal love of Our Lord, so to speak, and by desiring with all our heart to receive Him, since He wishes with all His heart to give himself to us. His love seemed even greater to me from the fact that, since His Incarnation sufficed for our Redemption, it seems that He's giving himself to us in the Sacred Host solely for our sanctification, not only by the application of the merits of His Incarnation and death, but also by the desire of His Goodness to make us share in all the actions of His life and to establish us in the practice of His virtues, wishing to make us like himself by His love.

AOn the second point--what we should do in order to give ourselves to God to make a good Communion--I thought we should have such great esteem for Holy Communion that it causes us to fear not having the dispositions for a worthy Communion, and that, since one of the effects of Communion--the principal one--is union with God, we must do our utmost to strive to remove the hindrances to this union. And seeing that the most dangerous of all is to be too self-centered, through love of our own will, if we=re to participate in the fruits of Holy Communion, it's essential for us to give ourselves to God to have only one will with Him; this is what I desired after having been shown by God on so many occasions that I'm incapable of any manner of good and utterly unworthy of Holy Communion.

AWhat I felt I should do is to regard more attentively the actions of the Son of God so as to try to unite mine with His, assisted by His grace. And because I know that God sees everything, I think we must always have a right intention in going to Communion, with no admixture of human respect, but by the love we should bear the holy and divine humanity of Jesus Christ, so

that we may correspond faithfully with the love He has for us in this Most Holy Sacrament. The knowledge God has given me of the abuse of Holy Communion I have often made during my life, leading a life that made me unworthy of it because of the violence of my passions, has inspired me with the desire to strive to mortify them, so as not to incur God's hatred instead of His love, should I continue to make a bad use of this divine food.@

AThese, dear Sisters, are ample means to dispose you to make a good Communion and to profit from your Communions. And when you receive Communion in this way and with the dispositions you yourselves have mentioned--for it's to you that God in His goodness has communicated all those truths, and I did nothing but recall them--when, I repeat, you receive Communion in this way, you can be sure that you=ve made a good Communion. You=ve said that you must ask God for this grace. Nothing is easier than that, and you obtain it if you ask for it properly, that is, wholeheartedly and with the desire to make use of it.

AThe means aren't lacking: mortifying your passions and senses, speaking little, not making useless visits, preparing yourselves from one Communion and another, and during that time, Sisters, always advancing in some degree of virtue and love of God, plus all the other efficacious means you mentioned, but on which I haven't had time to make any remarks. There is one you never mentioned, Sisters, and that is to go to confession; yes, Sisters, you must go to confession. It's the proximate preparation and the one that makes amends for the faults that may be present in all the others. It makes up for their imperfection and confers the grace that makes our souls so pleasing to God. So, we should go as often as possible because we can't be too pure when approaching God; above all, however, we should go with a firm purpose of amendment.

AYet another means to obtain forgiveness for all the sins we--you, Sisters, and me, a wretched sinner--may have committed in our Communions is to ask God's mercy for the past and His grace for the future. Make this request with your whole heart, each one of you personally; and I, as the most guilty, will do so aloud, both for you and for myself, with a heart filled with the confidence that God will not regard my sins but your desire.

AMy God, with all my heart I ask for your mercy. Mercy, my God, mercy for all the abuses we=ve made of Your grace! For our negligence in correcting the faults that have displeased You, mercy, my God! For all the times we=ve treated Your sacred mysteries unworthily, mercy, my God! Don't remember our sins. May those sorry days be blotted out, and may Your mercy forget them forever! I ask You this, my Lord, both for this Company and for myself, begging you at the same time, my God, to grant us the grace never again to approach Your holy altar without the preparation You desire, so that we may be able to put into practice the means You have shown us to be necessary for that, and may we always be faithful to Your grace and to Your holy love.

ADo not consider the voice of the sinner who is speaking to You, my God, but deign to look at the hearts of those who ask You for this mercy and grace; and I, though the most unworthy of all men, relying on Your promises, my God, will not fail to speak the words of blessing which confer Your Spirit and Your grace. As I pronounce them, may the Divine Goodness be pleased to pour them into the souls of those who receive them on your behalf! *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

32. - PERSEVERANCE IN OUR VOCATION

September 22, 1647

AThe subject of the present conference, dear Sisters, is perseverance in our vocation. The first point concerns the reasons each of us has for persevering until death in our vocation by means of the grace of God; and the second is what we should do when we feel shaken.

ASister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this?@ The Sister handed him the note she

had written, and His Charity took the trouble of reading it. AOn the subject of the conference, which is on the reasons we have for persevering in our vocation, I thought we should consider who founded it--no other than God himself. Secondly, I thought that the young man in the Gospel, who went away quite sad after hearing Our Lord tell him to sell all he had and follow Him, was totally forgotten by people. In the same way it is to be feared that a Daughter of Charity who is unfaithful to her vocation may be forgotten by God and by others. The second point is on what we should do when we feel troubled about our vocation. I thought we should sometimes go over in our minds the motives that had led us to give ourselves to God in this vocation, and to recall the fervor with which we carried out what was prescribed when we began. Another means is often to look upon our Lord in His sufferings, which were great and which lasted all His life until His death.@

ASo those are two reasons our Sister has given on this first point. The first is to consider who is the author of the way of life we=ve embraced--and who is none other than God himself. That's true, Sisters, and it's a very good reason because, when a Daughter of Charity who is tempted to abandon her vocation begins to consider that God is its author, will she not see that it's the devil who, by his wiles, is trying to lure her away from it?

AThe second reason she proposes for holding fast is the fear that the same thing may happen to us as to the young man who sought Our Lord in order to ask Him what he should do to gain the kingdom of heaven. When Our Lord told him to sell what he had and follow Him, the Gospel tells us that he went away quite sad, and from that time on no mention is made of him, and nothing whatever is said of what happened to him. Now, Sister means to say that the same holds true of a person who abandons her vocation and leaves the place where God had sent her; she's forgotten by God and by others. That Sister, who could have done so much good, who had a talent for serving the poor and would have greatly benefited from it, and who could have given glory to God by so many good works that would have made her so happy if she had allowed herself to be guided, withdraws; no one speaks of her any more; no one asks what she's doing or not doing, but they leave her to herself, just as she is.

AOn the second point, Sister made another two remarks, the first being that we should reflect on the motives that led us to choose our vocation. What a great means that is, Sisters, for renewing your fervor! For, as a rule, when we are tempted, we forget everything else, and nothing seems reasonable to us except what inclines us toward the temptation. >But I don't know if it's God who has called me to this state of life.= Well, what could have made you abandon what you were, if not God? Is it flesh? Is it blood? Alas! by the mercy of God, flesh and blood don't get much satisfaction in the Company. >But,= someone may say, >can one be tempted to abandon her vocation when it comes from God?= My reply, Sisters, is that she can. But if the temptation were to last a day, a week, or a month, or should it last six months, or even years, that would be no reason, Sisters, to make you think your vocation might not be from God.

A >But were the saints tempted?= Indeed they were, Sisters, and very strongly tempted! >*Quoi*? as long as I=ve been?= Some were tempted all their lives. And God allowed this to manifest His power and glory by showing that, although the devil may strive to lead His servants astray, nevertheless, they do not fail in the fidelity they owe Him.

ANow, temptations arise in two ways. Sometimes they come from God, who proposes His servants to the devil to put him to shame, as He did with Job. >Look at my servant Job,= said He, >how faithful he is to my law.= At once the devil asks permission to tempt him, and God allows him to do so to show how His servant remains as staunch under trial as he had been in

tranquillity, and even to give him the opportunity to merit the crown by winning the victory.

AThe devil also tempts the servants of God because he's envious of the good they accomplish, both for themselves and for their neighbor; he wants them to fall to prevent them from continuing. Take, for instance, a Daughter of Charity who sets out to bring a pot of soup to a sick person. That's not such a great thing; it's just a little soup. But when she takes it, she'll say a few good words to the patient and God will touch his heart. Oh! that causes the devil to burst with rage. She snatches from him this soul whom he thought was his own; in revenge, he'll do everything in his power to ruin the Sister herself, and will begin little by little. First, he'll make her spiritual exercises difficult for her; then he'll cause her petty vexations that will put her in a bad mood; next, he'll influence her to go about her work listlessly for form's sake. Afterward she'll grow slack in the practices of her Rule, then begin to find them distasteful and, in the end, will abandon everything. And how does she reach that stage? By not remaining firm in her conviction that the Institute comes from God, and that He called her to it to work out her salvation. And for not having a high enough respect for what she was, she has fallen miserably. Well! let's not make any judgment; only God knows that.

ABut what will happen next, Sisters? Because she has made herself unworthy of God's choice of her, this poor Sister will be divested of the grace He gave her, a grace sufficient for her sanctification. When we priests are so wretched as to commit a crime that merits death, we are condemned by the judges and sent to the Bishop to be defrocked. When the criminal has come before the Bishop, he is clothed once again in his priestly vestments; then the Bishop recites an imprecation in Latin, stating that, for having unfortunately abused his vocation, he has rendered himself unworthy to wear the chasuble; and the chasuble is taken off first. The Bishop then continues and says that, for having abused his vocation, he has made himself unworthy of the holy stole; and the stole is taken away. Then it's the maniple, the cincture, the alb, and all the other priestly vestments.

ANow, Sisters, the same holds true of God with regard to a Daughter of Charity who loses her vocation. In His mercy, God called her; He let her see the good she was embracing; He gave her the grace to carry out what she was supposed to do. And this Sister will neglect her Rules, will make no account of obedience, will love her own will, and will disdain the warnings given her by her Superiors. God bears with her for a time, shows her the state in which she is, allows her faults to become known and that she be admonished to correct them. And since she spurns all that, God says, >I called you from your home to enjoy the rewards promised to those who serve Me, and you have made yourself unworthy of them; therefore I shall give to someone else the crown I had prepared for you=; and He'll call a young woman from Touraine, or Saintonge, or Brittany to come here to receive the crown that, in His mercy, he had intended for Marie, Françoise, Jeanne, or someone else whom He had called and who made herself unworthy of it. That, dear Sisters, is what God does when, by our cowardice, we have been the occasion for His just wrath to be vented on us.

AWill you please tell us your thoughts, Sister?@

AI thought that one reason for being steadfast in our vocation is that God is glorified in it by the exercises of piety we carry out daily in serving poor persons. The second reason is that it's useless to begin well if we don't persevere so as to increase God's glory.@

ASo then, there are two reasons our Sister notes on the first point, namely, that God is glorified in us by the virtues we practice, and that it's not enough to begin well if we don't persevere so as to increase God's glory. How good God is, Sisters, to be willing to be glorified

by the actions of a poor country woman! Jeanne, Marie, and Françoise will gladly put up with what is said to them as they go about serving the poor. That's practicing patience. This sick person will be discontented, and they'll still try to draw him out of his bad mood, speak to him about God, teach him to make an act of faith, and that's practicing charity. If the patient tells them he's not well cared for, they'll blame themselves, and that's practicing humility. In this way they'll find occasions to practice a thousand virtues, by which God will be glorified. When you see Sisters who don't seek their own interests nor their own ease, and who are always even-tempered, isn't it obvious that there's a God for whom they=re working? And when people see them growing in virtue and working until death, they'll be showing that they really love God and that nothing can separate them from Him.

AWell, Sister, what should a Sister do who feels troubled, tempted, and driven to abandon everything?@

AI think she should mention the fact to our Superiors as to persons given us by God to guide us in our vocation.@

ADo you think that's a means of overcoming the temptation? Yes, it certainly is, and it's an infallible one, provided it's used sincerely and with the intention of following the advice that will be given us; for nothing wards off the blows of the devil so surely as to mention them; as soon as he sees he has been discovered, he leaves the field. That's why, Sisters, it's a good thing for those who feel tempted to go to the Superior and state frankly and truly the exact state of affairs: >I feel tempted for such and such a reason, Monsieur. That gives me certain ideas; please tell me what I should do.= And, Sisters, believe what the Superior tells you, for it's not much good to ask for advice if you don't follow it. When a sick person asks the doctor what diet he should follow and then, instead of listening to him, does just the opposite, he'll become even sicker. The same holds true of spiritual ills; if you don't comply with the advice God gives you by your Superiors and if, instead of following it, you raise objections like, >Yes, he told me that, but he doesn't know the real state of affairs,= rest assured that your condition, instead of improving, will only grow worse.

AWould it be a good thing, Sister, for a person who is in this state to speak of it to another Sister?@

AI don't think so, Monsieur, because the person to whom it's said may fall into the same temptation.@

AYou=re right, Sister; no, it should be mentioned only to those to whom God has given the grace to assist you in your temptation. A poor Sister is working away peacefully without a thought of anything else but her doing her duty; if you go and tell her your troubles, instead of helping you in them, she'll find herself in difficulties, and you'll only ruin each other. Furthermore, that's giving bad example; it's giving scandal. This Sister thought you were one of those most attached to your vocation, but now she'll be frightened at seeing you tempted, unaware that it's in accord with God's plan and, instead of helping you, she'll harm you, and perhaps be lost as well as yourself.

AAnother means, Sister? Aren't you aware of any?@ To which the Sister replied that temptations should be resisted the moment they arise and shouldn't be allowed entrance into our hearts.

AThat's the great, sovereign remedy, for if we close our hearts and ears to temptation, the devil will indeed have a hard time carrying out his plans! To help us in this, it's well to turn to God the moment we feel tempted and to say to Him, >My God, You see where the enemy is

attacking me and You know how weak I am; please help and sustain me so I won't fall.= And it would be well for those to whom God has granted the grace of giving themselves more perfectly to Him and who have promised to serve Him in the Company, to renew their vows; yes indeed, that would be a good thing! It gives renewed strength and draws down new graces. Those who can do so and who are in this state should adopt this means with humility and with the confidence that God will assist them; those who aren't yet bound by vows, should renew their resolution as soon as they feel shaken. >Alas, my God! I'm on the point of giving in, unless you sustain me; have pity on my weakness and don't let me fall.= And let them make known their temptation.@

Another Sister said, in reference to the first point, that the reward was a strong reason for persevering. Another good reason is the fear that God might abandon us in a state that isn't in conformity with His Will.

ASister, what becomes of a Daughter of Charity who forfeits her vocation?@

I think she runs a great risk of being lost.@

A*Mon Dieu,*@ said M. Vincent, joining his hands and raising his eyes to Heaven, A*mon Dieu, mon Dieu,* we mustn't judge! That's reserved to God. We still have to pray for her and humble ourselves, but never speak or think of those who have left. There's reason to believe that Sisters who have died in the Company are now at rest, by the mercy of God. Ah, well! *in nomine Domini!*

AWould you please tell us your thoughts, Sister?@

AApart from a special reason obliging me to persevere in my vocation, I also perceived that, as a rule, the call comes from God and subsequent ones are a temptation rather than a call. Another reason is that the end of all our good actions crowns the work; so, if we want to be crowned, we must persevere until death, following the example of Our Lord, who wasn't satisfied with becoming man, but persevered until death in the work of our redemption.

AOn the second point, it seemed to me that when we feel shaken, we must try not to dwell on those feelings of disgust, and avoid like poison to our soul anything that may induce us to talk about them. We should turn to God and say what Pilate said about the inscription on the Cross, >What is done, is done,= and disregard every thought contrary to our original resolution. We can also ask our Superiors to help us to resist the temptation.@

ASisters, before going any further and so as to teach those who aren't sure of what we=re discussing, let me tell you what a vocation is. A vocation is a call from God to do something. The vocation of the Apostles was a call from God to implant the faith throughout the world; the vocation of a religious is a call from God to observe the Rules of religious life; the vocation of married persons is a call from God to serve Him in establishing a family and raising children; the vocation of a Daughter of Charity is the call of God, the choice His Goodness has made of her, rather than of so many others who came to His mind, to serve Him in all the ministries proper to this state of life to which He allows the Sisters to devote themselves. Your vocation, then, Sisters, is of such a nature that God, from among so many thousands of millions, looked on you, you who are with the children, you who are with the convicts, you who are in the Motherhouse, in the hospitals, in the villages, in the parishes and said, while choosing you, one from this place, another from that, >I want this soul to sanctify herself by serving me in such or such a ministry.=

AAnd that, Sisters, is your vocation. When God makes His choice, He often calls you by means unknown to you, but most often by the desire He gives you for it and your perseverance in seeking admission. After that, Sisters, you shouldn't say to yourselves, >But is it God who has

willed this?= For when you reason in that way, very often it's because you experience difficulty in the practice of the humility, submission, and obedience you need, and which the devil tries to make impossible for you. God is steadfast in His judgments, Sisters. The salvation of souls is so dear to Him that He takes all the care needed to put them on the easiest path to arrive on the road to heaven. But don't try to leave it, for as soon as a man who has set out on a long journey leaves the highway or turns off from it, he's in danger of finding only paths that will lead him far from the place to which he was going.

AThe person who would transplant trees shortly before the season for bearing fruit, then dig them up again to plant them somewhere else, would never gather any fruit; trees moved about from place to place and from soil to soil would even be in danger of dying.

AJudas, whom God called to be an Apostle and to whom He had given so many graces, thought he=d do better in another way of life. You all know his story and how he destroyed himself. But, by the mercy of God, his place didn't remain vacant, and God called Saint Paul from the Gentile world in which he was plunged to make him a worthy vessel of election.[1]

ALet's go on, *in nomine Domini.* Sister, please tell us your thoughts.@

AThe reason we have to persevere to the end is that perseverance merits the crown and, on the contrary, for want of perseverance, we may lose the merit of all we=ve done until now and fall into a deplorable state of abandonment, as a punishment for the loss of our vocation. I fear this so strongly that I ask God daily to let me die instead. On the second point, I thought it well to be strongly attached to God, who is steadfast; to motivate myself to observe the practices proper to our vocation by considering the glory we can render to God and by the hope of the rewards promised to those who do what we should do; above all, to believe firmly that we=ve been called by God and that every thought to the contrary comes from the devil; to be on our guard against dallying with temptation but to represent it to God in a loving way, to ask His assistance and to commend ourselves to the Guardian Angel of the Company.@

AAnd you, Sister, please tell me why we=re obliged to persevere in our vocation.@

ABecause God has placed us in it.@

AWould there be any danger, Sister, in leaving the place where you know God has willed you to be?@

AI think it would stir up God's wrath against us and oblige Him to abandon us.@

A*Mon Dieu*! what an important remark she has just made! Sisters, please pay close attention to it. >Because,= said she, >God has placed us in it.= Have you ever heard of a soldier deserting the post where his captain had placed him? A soldier posted as a sentry by his captain remains there, come rain, wind, or hail; whether he's frozen with cold or cannons are discharged at him; he may not depart, even if he has to die. And if he is so cowardly as to desert, there's no mercy for him; he is shot because he didn't remain in the place where his captain had posted him.

AWhat other reason do you have, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that it would be better never to have come than to leave, because one's soul is in a state of torment and I think one can't be at peace.@

AYou can be sure of that, Sister, one couldn't be at peace. Alas! I know some women who are after me every day, begging me through all sorts of persons to take them back. Even yesterday someone came to me on behalf of one of them, and the other day it was for another one, saying, >Monsieur, this poor girl will never have any peace; she's languishing.= Now, Sisters, they=re not all at that point, for there are some who are insensitive. But most of them are so restless that they don't know where to turn, and it's very true that it would have been better had they never

come. Alas! they wouldn't have to be accountable for the graces they=ve wasted. The Master of the Sentences[2] regards the perseverance of a girl or woman as so important that he says that the woman who knows how to resist temptations hurls the demon into hell. The devil is condemned to be eternally in hell, and although he leaves it to tempt people, he still carries his hell with him. And the woman who has the strength to resist him causes him such dismay that she hurls him into the depths of hell, never more to leave it. It's the Master of the Sentences, Sisters, first among the theologians, who says this. Now, just as this plunges the devil into profound sadness, it also gives joy to God--yes, joy to God. That a woman, a poor girl, can give joy to God! Yes, she can! God regards and takes pleasure in seeing our fidelity in the midst of temptations. And He rejoices when, despite all the battles of flesh and blood, despite all the cunning of the evil spirit, we persevere in what we=ve undertaken for love of Him.

AAnd you, Sister, what should we do when we feel tempted? What means do you think we can use to resist?@ The Sister replied that it would be well to reread the resolutions taken during retreats. AOh! Sisters, what an excellent means! For these were thoughts that came to us from God when we were conversing very familiarly with Him; they=re provisions that He gave us for our time of need. And that's why it's very good for us to gather them together so we can use them in time of need. Those who can't read should have them read aloud and each of you should say, >Wasn't it God who gave me that thought? Wasn't I urged on by some good motive to take that resolution?= You'll certainly find that an excellent means to resume once more what you began, Sisters.

ASomeone may say, >But is there anyone who isn't tempted? For that's a heavy enough burden. How can we always know if they=re temptations?= To this I answer yes, Sisters; there are persons who aren't tempted, and these persons are of two sorts. The first are those who do whatever comes into their head. As soon as they feel envious, they yield to this. They don't experience the temptation because they give in to it at once. And since they don't resist, they say they=re not tempted. The others are spiritual persons to whom divine things are so pleasant and agreeable that they never experience feelings of repugnance. I will tell you, however, that all God's servants generally are tempted. It's Saint Paul who says so.

I=ve known only two servants of God who weren't tempted. One was converted from the religion,[3] and he became a priest. Since his conversion he has never had any trials, never any feelings of repugnance, not the slightest thought in the world contrary to perfection, and so content in his state that he couldn't be more so. The other was a woman who devoted herself to good works and the devout life, in which she made great progress. She never felt any temptation contrary to the good she was doing. Now, what happened to those two persons? They were tempted by not being tempted. They would say, >I know quite well that all God's servants are tried, are subject to temptation, and that the devil leaves in peace only those who belong to him. How is it, then, that I'm not tempted, that I feel nothing to the contrary? Doubtless, God is not concerned with me.= Not to be tempted was a stronger temptation for them than if they had actually been tempted; it was the heaviest cross they could bear.

ASister, would you please tell us what thought you had on the topic of this conference?@ The Sister replied that, as long as we loved our Rules, God wouldn't permit us to lose our vocation.

ABlessed be God, Sisters! Those are so many motives and means for being faithful to our vocation and for resisting temptations against it. I'm pressed for time and won't stop to recapitulate them, but I'll just say about the last remark that it's true, Sisters, that as long as you love your Rules, God won't permit you to lose your vocation. Was any Sister who left us exact in

her Rules? You won't find a single one. One of them failed to observe one article, another failed to observe another; not one of them kept everything. You saw a certain negligence in the way they did things--as if they were merely doing them for form's sake, and never that spirit of fervor and recollection we should have when we set out to please God. So, love your Rules, dear Sisters; keep them as the path by which God wants to lead you to himself, and rest assured that as long as you follow them, God, who has prescribed them for you, given them to you, and placed you on the road to practice them--rest assured, I repeat, that He won't allow you to go astray.

AWhen Our Lord told His Apostles everything they had to do, He didn't promise them wealth in this world; He didn't say to them, >You will be at rest; you will be at peace; you will have nothing to do but serve Me; nothing will hinder you,= but rather, >You will have to testify before kings, etc.= He promised them crosses, trials, and sufferings and, in their persons, He promised this to those who would wish to follow him. Saint Paul wasn't exempt from temptations. He endured very painful and very violent ones. So, let's not be surprised, Sisters, if we=re sometimes tried, but let's make use of the means God gives us to resist them; above all, let's ask Him for the grace for ourselves and for all our Sisters to die a thousand times--if that were possible--rather than ever to consent to the temptations our enemy may send us against our vocation.

AThis is what I ask you, my God, for myself, for all our Sisters here present, and for those who are not. We are weak, my God, and capable of giving in at the first assault. You have called us by pure mercy; may Your infinite goodness be pleased to preserve us. On our part, with the help of Your holy grace, we will do all in our power to render You all the services and all the fidelity You await from us.

AGrant us, then, my God, grant us the grace to persevere until death. I ask You this by the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, confident that You will grant it to me. I will now pronounce the words of blessing, with which I entreat You to bestow on the entire Company the spirit that from all eternity You have willed it to have. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

33. - PURITY OF INTENTION

July 11[1]

AThe first point of this conference deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity should perform all their actions in a spirit of charity and with God in view, that is, Sisters, with the intention of pleasing God; second, some means to be taken in order to perform all our actions in this way, and third, the evils that may arise, or the harm there is in not doing our actions with this intention.

AThat's the subject of the present conference, Sisters. It has been a long time since we=ve had such an important one, because it's the intention that gives weight to all our works and makes them meritorious in the sight of God.

ASister, would you please tell us the reasons you=ve thought of with reference to this topic?@ The Sister replied that, if we do all our actions with the intention of pleasing God, He himself will be our reward. To have the intention of pleasing God means that we shouldn't seek any reward but act purely for love of Him. Without this intention, it's impossible to persevere in our vocation.

AIsn't that beautiful, Sisters? I can't let it pass without calling your attention to it. If the Daughters of Charity were at this point, what glory and service they=d give to God, and how God himself would take pleasure and delight in them! And you, Sister, why is it good for Daughters

of Charity to perform all their actions in a spirit of charity?@

ABecause it's more pleasing to God, Monsieur.@

AAnd what do you have to do to have this intention of being more pleasing to God, Sister?@

ATo ask God, the first thing in the morning, for the grace to do nothing all day long except for love of Him.@

AAnd if a Sister doesn't do that, what happens to her if she works hard from early morning with nothing on her mind other than to get on with her work and with no thought of God?@ The Sister replied that, without this intention, we labor in vain and all that we do counts for nothing. Another said that, to induce us to do all our actions well, it's good to call to mind God's greatness; another, that we should do them with quiet promptness and without haste, especially since that sometimes prevents us from lifting our soul to God.

Another Sister said that one reason for doing all our actions in a spirit of charity is that we=re far removed from this virtue, which is so necessary and without which we bear unworthily the name of Daughters of Charity, since it's to be feared that we may be so only in appearance and not in reality. A further reason is that if we don't act with God in view, we=re acting to please creatures; consequently, we receive our reward in this world and won't receive that of our heavenly Father, since we=re not working for Him. A third reason is the warning Saint Paul gives us that, if we were to do all kinds of good deeds but didn't have charity--meaning the pure love of God--all that would serve us as nothing.

One good means is to keep ourselves in the close presence of God and in that way to motivate ourselves to please Him who sees us constantly; to examine ourselves more often to see whether our intentions are not mingled with any others than the love of God and, if we notice any that are not pure, to strive to uproot them.

Another means is to be strongly convinced that poor persons are the members of the Son of God and that, in them, we serve the person of Jesus Christ.

AOn the third point, I thought that, without this spirit, great disunion may arise in the Community, especially since, where charity is wanting, so is union; consequently, there is no Community because what maintains it is union of hearts. The result is that many even lose their vocation because, if the actions performed in it are lowly and humble, and they=re not elevated by the spirit of charity and the thought of the presence of God in which they should be done, we easily allow ourselves to be influenced and discouraged by the spirit of the world, which is simply a spirit of pride and ambition, and we are unable to sample the humiliations of Jesus Christ. My resolution is to consider God alone in all my actions so as to do them for love of Him, with the help of His holy grace.@

With regard to the first point, another Sister said that it's appropriate to bear in mind the Sovereign Majesty of God, that the principal end of all our actions is to please Him, and that they couldn't be acceptable to Him if they lacked the spirit of charity. The second reason is that, if we don't perform our actions in this spirit and with this intention, they=re lost to us and can't be meritorious before God. The third reason is that we=re called Daughters of Charity, and we=d act contrary to the meaning of this name if we had any other motives in our actions than that of pleasing God and of doing them in a spirit of charity. So that our actions may be animated with this spirit, it's well to unite them with similar actions of Jesus Christ and to His constant aim of pleasing His Eternal Father, in order to make up for what is lacking in ours, and to the spirit of charity with which all His actions were animated, in order to heat up the tepidity of ours. Another means is to lift our souls to God each day and, if possible, before each of our principal

actions, to ask Him for the grace to do this in a spirit of charity, with a view to pleasing Him alone. On the third point, I noticed three principal faults contrary to this holy practice, the first of which is that, if we don't have the intention of pleasing God, nor the spirit of charity, we perform our actions indifferently or they have no merit. Another fault would be to do them for our own satisfaction, with no other aim than self-gratification. The third--and the worst of all--would be to do them to please others and to win esteem for ourselves.

AVery good! dear Sisters, by the mercy of God that's very good indeed! You=ve brought forward some excellent reasons and, from the way you presented them, it seems that your hearts have been touched by them and that all of you are determined to begin the practice of doing nothing from now on except with the aim and intention of pleasing God. That's what Saint Paul meant by the words, >Whether you eat or drink, do it for the love of God!=[2] If actions of this nature are made meritorious and pleasing to God in everything when they=re done for love of Him, Sisters, how much more will actions be that are excellent in themselves, such as prayer, the observance of Rule, assisting the poor, etc.! Yet we often do them without intention and without attention. *Mon Dieu*! dear Sisters, how much will we be losing by not applying ourselves to what we do, and of how much we deprive Our Lord by not offering our actions to Him!

ADo you think, Sisters, of the pleasure God takes in regarding a soul that's intent on pleasing Him, careful to offer Him all it plans to do? It's beyond imagining, Sisters, and the Sister was so right in saying that it gives joy to God. Yes, it's a joy to Him, His good pleasure, His delight. He's like a father is with a son who takes care to bring him everything people give him; if someone gives him something he has no rest until he has found his father and says, >Look, Dad! Look what I have; this was given to me; I did that myself!= And the father takes indescribable pleasure at seeing the docility of that child and those little tokens of his love and dependence. The same holds true of God, dear Sisters, and in a far higher degree. When a person says to Him in the morning, >My God, I offer you everything that may happen to me today,= and, in addition, on all the principal occasions that arise to do or to suffer something during the day, she glances interiorly toward the Divine Majesty and says in wordless language, >Look at what I'm about to do for love of You, my God; this situation is painful and hard to bear but, for love of You, nothing is impossible to me;= then, Sisters, God gives an increase of grace in proportion to the use His Goodness sees the person making of it. If today she's had the strength to surmount one difficulty, tomorrow she'll have it to overcome another--or several--far greater and more painful.

AMany other things have been said that could help you to understand the importance of this practice, the glory God receives from it, and the benefit that comes to souls who devote themselves to it, but it would take me too long to repeat them to you. What, then, should be done? That's the whole point.

AIt was said in the first place that we should turn to our Guardian Angels, and it's true. . . .@[3]

34. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

January 22, 1648

First point: the reasons we have for consenting to have our faults made known and being admonished for them.

Second point: the means of profiting from the admonitions given us.

AIt's been a long time since we discussed a matter of so great importance, Sisters. It's a question of showing the reasons why it's expedient and even necessary for our faults to be made known and for our Superiors or others to do us the charity of reminding us of them. This is a

practice repugnant to nature, but grace will make it easy if we have the sincere disposition God is asking of us in the way of life it has pleased His Goodness to choose for us.

ASister, is it well for our Superiors to be informed of our faults?@

AYes, Father.@

AWhy should they be made aware of them?@

ABecause that makes us more careful to watch over ourselves.@

AAnd you, Sister, do you think it's a good idea for our Superiors to know when we=ve failed?@

AYes, Monsieur, for sometimes we commit faults without realizing it; and when our Superiors do us the charity of reminding us of them, we see that they=re faults and take care to avoid them.@

ABut, Sister, what if it's a fault of which a person knows she's guilty and perhaps wants to keep on committing? I don't think there are any such persons in the Company--may God preserve us from that--but it can sometimes happen. A Sister who may be somewhat indisposed will see in this a reason for not rising in the morning and, for fear of becoming ill because of it, will stay in bed. She knows this is against her Rule but, because she sees some reason for excusing herself, she thinks she's really excused. Is it well for the Superioress to be notified of this?@

AYes, Father, because the admonition of the Superioress will counteract the laziness that keeps us from doing what we should do.@

AAlso, Sister, in the case of Sisters who aren't in this house, like those in the parishes, or out in the country, or in the hospitals, if they commit any faults, is it well that others be informed of them--Mademoiselle, if she's in a place where that can be done, or the Sister Servant of the places where they are?@

AI think that no matter where we are, Monsieur, if we commit faults, they should be made known to our Superiors and also to others because the shame that ensues prompts us not to fall into the same faults again.@

AWell, Sister, suppose someone were to accuse you wrongly sometimes, what should you do then? Wouldn't it be better to explain that a mistake had been made?@

AI think it would be more pleasing to God to say nothing, Monsieur, and to endure that calumny with humility because we commit many other faults that people are unaware of.@

AIf I understand correctly, Sister, you think that, should we be unjustly rebuked for some fault, it would be better to accept the correction without saying anything rather than to justify ourselves. I certainly agree with you there, and I hold that, unless the silence were sinful or would harm the interests of our neighbor, it's far better to act in that way. That's imitating Our Lord. How many persons made accusations against Him, found fault with His life, censured His teaching, and vomited execrable blasphemies against His person! Yet, no one saw Him excuse himself. He was brought before Pilate and Herod; yet, He said nothing in His own defense and, in the end, allowed himself to be crucified. There's nothing better than to follow the example He has given us. In this respect I can tell you, dear Sisters, that I=ve never seen anything happen to a person who refused to defend himself--never. It's not up to us to give explanations; if people blame us for something we haven't done, it's not for us to defend ourselves. God wants us to leave the discernment between truth and falsehood to Him, Sisters. He'll know the opportune time for making known the truth. If you knew how good it is to leave all these concerns to Him,

Sisters, you=d never try to justify yourselves. God sees how we=re maligned and doubtless permits this to test our fidelity. He knows how you take it, the good results you draw from it, or the bad use you make of it and if, for the moment, He allows you to be charged with it, He'll certainly know how to manifest the truth later on. It's a true and infallible maxim, Sisters, that God always justifies those who don't try to justify themselves.

AJust tell me, Sister, do we do well by not saying anything when corrected for a fault we haven't committed? Do we have an example of that? Did Our Lord ever give us any?@

AYes, Father,@ she replied.

AYes, Sisters, He gave us the example not in one solitary action but throughout His life. In these circumstances, Sister, is it a good practice to picture Our Lord before Pilate when the crowd falsely accused Him and He offered no defense?@ The Sister replied that this practice seemed good and useful to her because our emotions are usually aroused, and, if we=re not careful, nature immediately takes the upper hand.

AAnd in such a case, Sister, wouldn't it be well for her to seek out one of her Sisters--the one to whom she's the closest--and tell her of her displeasure? >I=ve just been talking to the Superioress, who told me I had committed such and such a fault. But that's not true. I did say it, but not in the sense she says I did. Am I not allowed to justify myself? *Bon Dieu*! is my whole life going to be like that?= What do you think, Sister? Would there be any harm in unburdening yourself in that way?@

AYes there would, Monsieur,@ replied the Sister, Abecause I might win over the Sister to my side and, instead of doing myself any good, I=d cause harm by murmuring and give my Sister reason to complain on another occasion when something displeased her.@

ASo, Sister, you think it would be wrong to complain?@

AYes I do, Monsieur.@

AYou=re so right! and this is such a great evil that when mention is made in Holy Scripture of the seven sins God detests,[1] it is stated that murmuring is abominable in the sight of God. Yes, Sisters, of those seven sins there isn't one that God seems to hold in greater horror than murmuring, and, although murder and robbery are specified among the seven, murmuring is still more abominable. All of you are horrified at the mere mention of the word >murder,= yet, if we don't keep our evil inclinations tightly in check, we'll often allow ourselves to give way to murmuring. Be very careful about that, Sisters. What do you think murmuring is in your Community? It's a plague that ruins everything. To destroy everything, all you need is one Sister who complains and another who listens to her. It's the mother of division.

ATell me, Sister, why do we usually make excuses for the faults people accuse us of committing?@

AI think pride is the cause, Monsieur; and I say that because many times I=ve had experience of this, and sometimes have allowed myself to give way to complaining of my Superioresses and Superiors, for which I ask pardon of God, of you, Father, and of all my Sisters.@

ABlessed be God, Sister, for the knowledge His Goodness has given you of the origin of this evil! It's very true that it comes from pride, which can't endure that someone should think anything but good of us. That's why, Sisters, we have to make the effort to uproot this evil, detestable vice from the Company; and to do it more easily, we=ve arranged with Mademoiselle that, at the usual Friday conferences where you accuse yourselves of your faults, if someone does not accuse herself of a fault, one of the Sisters who witnessed that fault should kneel down and

say, >Sister, in a spirit of charity, I remind you that recently you committed such a fault. I'm so wretched that I=ve committed many others of which I'm ignorant but, because the Rule so ordains, I remind you of this one; and if someone has noticed any of mine, I very humbly ask her to have the charity to remind me of them.= And she will kiss the floor. That's the way we=ve judged it advisable to remind someone of her faults--in these or similar terms, but always very humbly and charitably. Do you think that will be helpful, Sister?@ M. Vincent had the charity to question several Sisters one after the other, even the oldest, then all in general; and everyone agreed.

Mademoiselle said that she judged this practice very necessary, provided the Company not only agreed to it but also desired it, bearing in mind the good that would follow from it. To this, Most Honored Father responded, AYou=ve seen the great blindness that closes our eyes to our own faults, Sisters; you=ve seen the progress we can make if we=re admonished in the proper manner; you=ve already approved the means I suggested to you; do you want this, Sisters?@ They all declared that they did.

Mademoiselle begged him to allow one of our Sisters to do her the charity of admonishing her. To this he replied, AIf all our Sisters had the happiness of being reminded of their faults, it wouldn't be fair, Mademoiselle, that you and I alone should be deprived of such a benefit and be so unfortunate as not to receive this charity from someone. In certain Communities, a person is specially charged to admonish the Superioress. It will therefore be necessary for a Sister, who will be your Assistant and will take your place in your absence, to receive the complaints to be made; then, after hearing them, she will make her prayer on the subject and mention them to you. But I have a complaint to make about the man who is responsible for admonishing me, because he doesn't have enough charity for this and overlooks some of my really serious faults.

ASo, Sisters, these are the means God wants the Company to use to work at its advancement and the destruction of pride. If there are any Sisters who can't accept admonitions, that's a very bad sign; it's an indication that they=re willing to let pride hold great sway; and it's greatly to be feared that, without a very special grace, they'll make no progress. They'll render themselves unworthy of profiting from them if they don't soon take the trouble to make good use of them. If the Sister who is so disinclined to this is young and if, after being admonished, she doesn't change, I don't think the Company should keep her; if she's older, she must correct herself at all costs because she's supposed to give the example. You should know, Sisters, that some can't be of one mind and others of another; there has to be complete uniformity, and all of you, with the help of God, must continue to desire what you=ve just expressed.

AAn Emperor had several sons--ten or twelve, I'm not sure. Before he died he wanted to let them see the importance of unity for the peace of a State and the welfare of all. He had a large bundle of arrows brought to his bedside, and said to the youngest, >Come here, son; take this bundle of arrows and break it in two.= >Father,= said the boy, >I can=t.= He then turned to another, who gave the same answer, next to the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and all the others, who all admitted their inability. The father then said to the eldest, >Take one of them out of the bundle and see if you can break it.= The eldest did so quite easily. >Children,= the father then said, >this teaches you that as long as you=re united and closely bound together, all the powers in the world can do nothing against you, but as soon as you begin to be divided among yourselves, you'll be easily defeated.=

AI say the same to you, Sisters; if all of you are always of the same will, if you=re all in harmony, your Company, which God in His goodness has taken care to form, will be maintained

with good results and will serve as an example, and all the powers of earth and hell will be unable to do anything against it. But as soon as there are any Sisters who are attached to their own ideas, then good-bye to the poor Daughters of Charity, if God doesn't come to their assistance. May it please the Divine Goodness that, as long as the world shall last, this poor Company may always remain within the limits prescribed for it by God, and may humbly give the neighbor the relief and assistance to which it has committed itself!

ABecause it's getting late, Sisters, and most of you have come from a distance, we'll leave the conclusion of the present conference for some other day. In the meantime, we'll ask God to bless the resolution that each and every one of you has now taken, to be willing to be reminded of your faults by whomsoever and in whatever manner He may permit, without harboring any ill feelings against the person who reveals them. May it please His Divine Majesty to accept the disposition you now seem to have, and be willing to bless its beginnings, while I, wretched man, utter the words of blessing, A*Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

@HEAD40 = *Reflections of Mademoiselle*

AThe first reason for consenting to be reminded of our faults is that, if we are well aware of them, we'll have greater fear of the judgments of God. The second is that if we=re content to have our faults revealed and that helps us to know our own weakness well, then we'll tolerate our neighbor more easily and more charitably. The third is that we=re blind on this point, and if, by being told of them we know them well, we'll find this very beneficial for our progress in the perfection God wills and asks of us, along with a greater knowledge of the obligations we have to the holy humanity of Our Lord. This will enable us to increase the grateful love we should have for Him.

AOne means to benefit from admonitions is to show clearly that we=re willing not only to be reminded of our faults but also to have our Superiors informed of them. A second means is to manifest friendliness and affection toward the Sister who did us this act of charity. Another means is that, if we feel our heart protest through pride, and we want to complain of the person who has done us this favor, we should kneel at the foot of the Cross, if we can, or take our crucifix in our hands and reflect how often Our Lord was falsely accused, without complaining, and, on the contrary, said that if anyone had seen Him do wrong, they should have admonished Him for it. With the help of God's grace, I am determined to make better use than I have done in the past of the slightest remark made to me by anyone who calls my attention to a fault, acknowledging, before God and you, Father, and all my Sisters that I have truly failed in that through my pride.@

35. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

March 15, 1648

AThis conference, Sisters, is a continuation of the last one, which was on admonitions, that is, on the reasons we have for consenting that our faults be made known to others-- including the Superioress and Officers--and being corrected for them. This topic was so important for the welfare of the Company in general and the progress of each Sister in particular that it was judged advisable to hold a second conference in which each Sister--or the majority--should report how, on the occasions that presented themselves, she made use of what was said at the last one; if, despite the resolution taken before God and the promise that was unanimously made, she let slip any harsh or disdainful words about Sisters suspected of having reported the faults; and if, instead of profiting from those admonitions, any attempt was made to see where they came from; lastly, whether there have been any complaints.

APlease tell us, Sister, why a Daughter of Charity should be glad to have her Superioress notified of her faults and for the Superioress to correct her for them.@ The Sister replied that it was a means of preventing us from falling into them again, yet she had been so weak that, having been reminded about something, she wouldn't admit that there had been any fault in it, but maintained obstinately that there was none, thereby failing in submission; subsequently she had a fit of bad temper which, on several occasions, had given bad example to the Company. For this she asked pardon of God, of Most Honored Father, and of all our Sisters.

AYou admit, then, Sister, that they were faults?@

AYes, Father,@ said the Sister, Afaults that were the result of my willfulness and pride.@

ABlessed be God! You=re quite right in thinking that, Sister; and I thank the goodness of God, who has made you see this so clearly that, recognizing a lack of fidelity to God in having failed to accept willingly, as you had promised, the admonitions given you and that this made you lose your temper, become angry, complain, and give bad example, you are willing to be admonished from now on. For, tell me, Sisters, if a Sister had a conspicuous smudge of dirt on her face and, because no one said anything to her, went out in that condition, wouldn't she have good reason to complain and to say, >Because of you, people laughed at me.=And yet, the same holds true of us. We=re not aware of our own faults; we=re blind on that point. Those to whom God has entrusted us--and many others as well--see them clearly. If they didn't tell us, wouldn't we be right to complain or to think they don't feel that we=re far enough advanced to be able to profit from admonitions? Yes, we certainly would. If you consider the advantages to a person reminded of her faults, and the disadvantage to the one who doesn't receive this act of charity, you'll say, >I want to be admonished; it's the greatest benefit and the greatest charity that someone could do for me! *Quoi*! everyone else would know their faults, and I=d be like someone in the house afflicted with ozena![1] Everyone would shun me because of my imperfections, and I=d be like a person with ozena, who infects everyone else without even being aware of it!=

AI=ve used the word *ozena*, Sisters, because persons who have it don't realize that they have the disease. They have stomach trouble, bad breath, and infect everyone else, but they themselves are unaware of it. An Emperor had it so badly that no one could bear to stay around him. As soon as people came near him, they felt their stomach turn, and he knew nothing of it. One day one of his friends said to him, >Sire, you should consult some skillful physicians about your ozena; maybe they'll give you some remedy.= >What!= he said, >What! do I have that disease?= >You have it so badly,= said the other, >that no one can stand being near you.= >And why has this been concealed from me for so long? Why haven't my friends ever told me about it? Why didn't my wife tell me?= He went off to find the Empress. >Beloved, why didn't you ever tell me that I had ozena?= >Alas, Sire!= said she, >I made sure I didn't because I thought that all other men had breath that smelled like yours.= What an innocent this Princess was!

ABut please note the nature of this disease! Now, there's the ozena of sin which infects the soul, just as the other infects the body, and, if those who have no other interest than the glory of God and your salvation didn't tell you about it, you=d all be so infected with it that you=d have no idea you were tainted by it.

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us if you=ve noted any progress in the Company since it was decided that Sisters should be reminded of their faults?@

AFather, so far we really haven't begun this practice; maybe that's because I haven't yet asked the Sister whom Your Charity designated to admonish me. Perhaps she hasn't begun it

because my pride might not have easily accepted it. I very humbly ask pardon, Father, of you and of all our Sisters, for this negligence and for all the faults I=ve committed. In a spirit of humility and charity, I'll tell you that, since the last conference, although our Sisters had consented to be reminded of their faults, it often happened that some of them haven't taken it well and have complained, saying among themselves, >Who said that already?= or some similar remark, which indicated their displeasure that people were aware of their faults. Some of them also allow themselves to refrain from Holy Communion on the appointed days without asking for an exemption. Furthermore, Father, a certain liberty has slipped in with regard to rising on time in the morning. Some Sisters stay in bed until five o=clock, half past five, and even six, without asking permission or mentioning their needs. There are still other faults, which I forget at the moment. I ask pardon of the whole Company for not having reminded them of these when I thought of them.@

ASo then, Sisters, there are principally three things in which Mademoiselle has noted relaxation in the Company; pay close attention to them, for they=re very important. The first is rising in the morning. To make this easier for you, I=d like you to make up your mind the previous evening to be faithful to answering the voice of God, which will call you the next morning. The voice of God, Sisters, is the bell that summons you to go to adore God. Imagine that it's saying to you, >God awaits you; come, all of you, to adore Him.= It's the custom of the Church to say at the beginning of Matins, >Come, everyone; come to adore God.= It seems to be calling all nations, Princes, and peoples to come to adore God; that, Sisters, is the thought you also should have on rising: >I'm going to adore God, and He's waiting to receive the oblation of my heart.=

AAs for Holy Communion, you should know, Sisters, that you must also ask to be dispensed from receiving it on the appointed days, and permission to go to Communion on other days.[2] From the day you entered a Community under obedience to a Superioress, you=re no longer free to act according to your own will and judgment. She knows you better than you do yourselves; it's up to her to prescribe what's to be done.

AThe other failing is the one we=re now discussing; we=ve already said something about it. I'll tell you again clearly, Sisters, that although you may feel some repugnance at being reminded of your faults, you mustn't be surprised at this because very few persons can be told of their faults without being upset by it. Nature loves itself and finds it painful to hear its imperfections mentioned, but we must accustom it to this; therefore, Sisters, nature must be punished when we see that we=ve committed a fault. A Sister will admonish me and, instead of humbling myself, I'll try to justify myself and to show her that she's wrong; or, if I can=t, I'll be satisfied with saying to the other Sisters, >I=ve been told this or that just now, but it's nothing; it's a misunderstanding or has been reported incorrectly. Who would tell such tales? If I knew, I=d let them have it.= Sisters, as soon as you see that you=ve reached that point, punish yourselves to overcome this cursed nature, tainted by sin, which suggests all these reasons to us. Go to the Superior, or, if it's another Sister, go to her, and say, >Sister, I ask your pardon, I=ve taken badly the admonition you had the charity to give me. I'll try, nevertheless, to make good use of it, and I also entreat you, even if you see that my self-love is piqued, not to stop reminding me.=

ALet me tell you in connection with this, Sisters, that a holy religious, a very important person, had great repugnance at being admonished; yet, when the first emotion had passed--for he always became angry--he would get over it, ask pardon, and beg people to continue to remind him of his faults. He spent three or four years engaged in this conflict, then succeeded so well in

overcoming himself that nothing gave him more pleasure than to be reproved. Then he felt greater joy than the repugnance he had previously experienced, and he reached this point because of the violence he had done to himself in bearing with the admonitions and humbling himself for them.

ATell us, Sister, why is it right for us to be reminded of our faults?@

ABecause it's a means of correcting ourselves, and that helps us to preserve our vocation.@

AVery good! Our Sister has noted two great means for us: one means for correcting ourselves--for who wouldn't correct herself after an admonition?--and one means to preserve our vocation. Nothing can preserve it better than to raise ourselves up, by means of admonitions, from the faults that might cause us to lose it, were we not reminded of them.

AThe Visitation Nuns have a beautiful custom, which I find very helpful; when one of them reminds another of a fault, the one who receives the admonition kneels down and says, >It's true, Sister, that I=ve committed this fault through malice, pride, or some other motive; at the same time, I also committed another one because of such or such a reason.= You see, Sisters, instead of excusing themselves, they admit their faults, point out even greater ones that aren't apparent and, in addition, add another one. If it should please God that this be introduced into the Motherhouse and done in a spirit of humility, I defy all the demons in hell--even should they be ten times more numerous than they are--I repeat, I defy them to be able to upset it.

ASister, you down there at the back, do you think it's right for a Sister to be admonished of her faults?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that it's the best means we could have to correct them. Recently I was so proud that, when admonished of a fault by one of my Sisters, whom I myself had asked the charity to remind me, I showed that I didn't like it. I most humbly ask your pardon for this, and I ask pardon of you, Sister, who did me that act of charity.@ The other Sister knelt down and said, ASister, I'm the one who asks your pardon. I didn't admonish you as I should have done because there were other people present.@

AOh, that's the way to do it! One accuses herself for not having taken the reproof well, and the other for not having given it properly; in this way, each tries to put the blame on herself. I recently asked one of our Brothers who doesn't belong to our house here, >How is your family,[3] Brother? Are you getting along well in the country?= >Monsieur,= he replied, >it can't be otherwise because it's only a question of who will humble himself more; if any fault is committed, each man says that he's guilty of it and takes it on himself, so we have no trouble living very peacefully. We=re like children, and it's a marvelous blessing from God.= This good Brother really consoled me by that and made me see that their great peace and union was due to the fact that each was willing to be admonished, and even considered himself guilty of the faults. There was a holy rivalry among them to see who would humble himself most.

AIt's a key to the spiritual life, Sisters, to be willing to be reminded of our faults, to take admonitions well, and to believe that, if people knew us, they=d help us to see other faults. This humbles us interiorly because, if we take a good look at ourselves, we'll see that there's no one more wicked than we are; and, because we neglect to look closely at ourselves on account of the ugly things we see there, admonitions reveal to us what our self-love was hiding. If we accept them well, we'll find that this will gradually lead us to greater perfection.

AStand up, Sisters,@ he said to the Sisters who had remained kneeling. But the holy custom is to kiss the floor when you have accused yourself of your fault. . . . That's excellent! As long as the Daughters of Charity act in this way--that is, that they admonish one other in a spirit of

charity, humble themselves, and are faithful to the recognition and avowal of their faults--all hell will not prevail against them and will never be able to harm them. On the other hand, however, if someone among you were so ill-disposed as to be unwilling to be admonished and, instead of humbling herself, were to rebel and display her ill-humor to others, the smallest demon in hell would easily overpower her. Please be on the watch for this.

ASister, please tell us why we should want to be reminded of our faults?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that this helps us to improve more and more and gives the Sister who admonishes the chance to do an act of charity, and the one who is being admonished the opportunity to make an act of humility and submission.@

AThat's well put, and you=re so right, Sister, in saying that it helps us to improve, that the Sister who admonishes does an act of charity, and that the one who receives the admonition makes an act of submission. For, what greater help can we have to improve than to know our imperfections, and what greater charity can we do for someone who isn't aware of them than to point them out to her?

AAlas! as soon as we see a spot of mud on someone's linen or clothing, we immediately say, >Be careful, Sister, you don't want that to be ruined.@ And yet we=d see stains on someone's soul without telling her! That would be failing in charity. So, remember, Sisters, that it would be failing in charity not to admonish your Sister if you saw her fall into a conspicuous fault and she wasn't aware of it. Not that everyone should give admonitions, nor on every occasion, but you must choose your time so that the reminder may be beneficial.

ASister, please tell us your thoughts on the topic under discussion.@

ADuring the short time I meditated, Father, I thought it was necessary for us to be reminded in order to make us careful to correct our faults. I know from my own experience that I commit many faults that I notice but don't correct because no one says anything to me about them. Since I=ve come to the motherhouse and since the last conference, I=ve committed many against the practice of my Rules, where I haven't been careful. On the contrary, I=ve often used some slight pretext to excuse myself from them, especially rising in the morning. By so doing, I gave very bad example to the Sister with whom I was living, for she could easily see that there was no legitimate excuse for it. I=ve also failed greatly in the matter of admonitions, for I=ve neglected to correct the faults for which I was so gently reminded, out of compassion for my weakness, that I didn't realize they were admonitions. Because of my pride, I also took issue with Mademoiselle when she had the charity to remind me of a fault, because I was unwilling to admit that it was a fault and was too impertinent in trying to justify myself. For all that, Father, I most humbly ask pardon of God, of Your Charity, of Mademoiselle, and of all my Sisters. I beg them with all my heart to mention the faults they=ve noticed in me so that I may correct them.@

ABlessed be God, Sister, for the avowal of your faults His Goodness has allowed you to make! That's an excellent disposition for correcting them. As far as rising in the morning goes, we=ve already spoken about that. If each Sister didn't do something about this, we=d really have to worry that in the end it wouldn't be observed any longer. One means of preventing this disorder is to ignore the slight indispositions that might try to keep you in bed; for, if you stay in today because of them, tomorrow there will be others, and you'll always find some excuse. I make exception for the sick, but only those who are really sick and who suffer from not being able to keep the Rule. Apart from that, I don't think you should exempt oneself for minor ailments that are inconsequential. If you feel slightly unwell and stay in bed today and then again tomorrow, and if it doesn't pass, it's not rest that you need, and I think your health would

improve if you followed the Community schedule.

We had a priest with us who was very soft on himself. He had a few slight ailments and thought that rising in the morning contributed somewhat to them. >Very well, Monsieur,= he was told, >we shall see; stay in bed for one month without getting up and we'll see in the course of time how you=re feeling.= So, he spent a month sleeping to his heart's content and, at the end of that time, came to me and said, >Monsieur, I acknowledge that I have to follow the Rule. I=ve been resting all this time, and I'm worse than ever. Please let me get up.= We granted his request and he's doing very well. It's so true that early rising never does any harm; on the contrary, it dispels the humors that accumulate with too much sleep, and you'll always see that a person who rises regularly in the morning will have better health than one who lazes about and sometimes gets up early but more often late. Nothing accumulates unhealthy humors more than too much sleep. It causes catarrh, congestion, and a thousand other ailments that exercise eliminates. Furthermore, rising is the first act of fidelity we render to God when the bell summons us to do so; and the rest of the day is usually determined by rising in the morning. Believe me, there's no use haggling with your pillow, for you won't get the better of it.

AWell, Sisters, it's getting late, and it's time for each of you--and myself first of all, who have the greatest need of it--strengthened by God's grace, which He'll never refuse us, provided we=re faithful to Him, to take a good resolution to cherish and have special affection for those who will do us so much good as to admonish us of our failings, in the belief that there are no more sincere proofs of real affection than that.@

ABut, Father,@ said a Sister, Awhat if a Sister asked someone else to mention her faults, and the latter excused herself saying that she was too young? Would that be right?@

ASister, the one who excused herself would be between two virtues: humility, which would suggest to her that she's too young; and charity, which would oblige her to admonish her Sister. Now, since humility here concerns only herself, charity, which concerns the neighbor, is more perfect; in that case she should prefer the act of charity to humility. Even better, she's doing both: she's humbling herself by thinking that it's not for her, the younger one, to admonish her Sister, and she's practicing charity by accepting, because this virtue demands it and the Rule ordains it.

AYou see, Sisters, what you=re trying to do now is what the Church did in the fervent days of the early Christians. For four hundred years this practice was observed, not only with ordinary people but also with Princes, Kings, and Emperors. It was the duty of a deacon to write down the faults of which he was informed; this was done in accordance with the word of Our Lord who said that if our neighbor didn't correct himself after first being admonished in private and then in the presence of two or three witnesses, recourse was to be had to the Church.

AThe Bishop himself also said it when the case required it, as did Saint Ambrose[4] with the Emperor Theodosius. >You=ve had many people put to death,= said the saint, >and for that you=re stained with innocent blood. I won't open the door of the Church to you until you=ve cleansed yourself by suitable penance, and I forbid you to enter it.= >Father,= said the Emperor, >I confess that I have sinned. You are my Nathan;[5] you admonish me for my sin and I acknowledge it. Help me to obtain God's forgiveness, and I'll do whatever you command.= >You=ve followed David's example as a sinner;= replied the saint, >follow it now as a penitent, and I'll open the Church to you.= And he sent him away just like that until he did penance.

AOne of the Kings of France, an Emperor, was publicly flogged for a crime he had committed, and Henry II,[6] King of England, who had Saint Thomas the Archbishop of

Canterbury,[7] put to death, was condemned by the Pope to be publicly flogged for his crime. He endured it humbly, so true is it that Kings must recognize that they depend on God, who is greater than they. May God give each and every one of us the grace to recognize the importance of this practice and how greatly it can contribute to the perfection of each of us in particular and of the whole Company in general! May it please the Divine Goodness to bless the resolution we=ve taken once again to accept, and even to desire, that all our faults be made known to our Superiors, and to impart to us, with His blessing, His true Spirit, in order to make good use of this! *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

36. - THE GOOD USE OF INSTRUCTIONS

May 1, 1648

ADear Sisters, the subject matter of this conference is confined to two points: first, the reasons we have for profiting from the instructions given to us by our Superiors in the conferences and elsewhere; and second, the means we'll use to put those instructions into practice.

ASister, you down there at the back, please tell us your thoughts.@

AMonsieur, I think that one reason for profiting from the instructions given us at the conferences is the thought that you hold for us the place of God, and therefore we should listen to you and profit from all you tell us, as coming from Him.@

AAlas, Sister! I'm a miserable sinner and nothing else. And you, Sister, did you make your prayer on the present subject? Would you please tell us your thoughts?@

AI thought, Father, that when we=ve forgotten our duty, God allows us to be reminded of it at the conferences, and this reminder coming from God is one reason why we should profit from them. On the second point--the means--I thought that listening humbly to these instructions is a good means to profit from them, and I resolved to do so.@

The two Sisters who spoke next repeated substantially what the first Sister had said. Another stated that it was a means of advancing in virtue; another, that it was the voice of God who was instructing us at the conferences through the mouth of our Superiors, and that one means of profiting from them was to be convinced that the admonitions given there were sound.

ANot just the admonitions, Sister,@ replied Most Honored Father, Abut everything that is said and not only what the Superior says--for, alas! I'm only a poor wretched sinner--but also everything the Sisters say. For you see, Sisters, it's God who speaks to you and instructs you, through you yourselves, in what He wants you to do. Before you learned of the topic we=re now discussing, you hadn't thought about it; you placed yourselves in the presence of God; He spoke to your hearts and helped you to understand the reasons why you should profit from what is said during the conferences; or, if the conference is on some other topic, He teaches you the reasons you have for practicing the virtue that's being discussed and the means you will use from now on. When you=re questioned on it, you tell us the thoughts you had; consequently, we must listen to them as an inspiration God has given you both for yourselves and for us.

ASister, why do you think a Daughter of Charity should benefit from what is said at the conferences?@

ABecause God is glorified by it, Monsieur.@

AWhat you mean, Sister, is that God in His goodness, wishing to give the Company the virtues it needs, allows it to receive His instructions and is glorified when we=re faithful to the practices He ordains for us and has taught us. And what else?@

AIt's for our advancement.@

ASo then, Sister, you think that, when God has instructions given to you, His plan is to help you advance in the perfection of your state; and you=re quite right. And what should be done by a Daughter of Charity to whom God has given some inspiration during the meditation she made on the subject of a conference to guide her in the practice of a virtue or to get rid of some imperfection? Shouldn't she tell others? Should she keep it secret for herself alone? No, she should mention it humbly and simply, knowing and realizing that it doesn't come from her but from God, who gave it to her and wants her to share it with others, since they all share with her the ones they=ve had.

ASister, tell me a means of profiting from the instructions given at the conferences.@ The Sister replied that she thought it was helpful, for that purpose, to retain them in her memory. ADo you think, Sister, that a Daughter of Charity who remembers what was said at the conferences has certain advantages?@

AYes, Father, because that will help her on various occasions, and her neighbor will be edified by it.@

ASo you think, Sister, that a good Daughter of Charity who comes prepared to the conference, planning to make good use of the instructions given by the Superioress, the Superior, and the Sisters, who listens very attentively with the intention of pleasing God, and who leaves with her mind and heart filled with the thoughts with which God has moved her; you think, I repeat, Sister, that this Daughter can serve her neighbor? And how can she serve her? She'll serve her by her modesty, her example, and her words filled with the Spirit of God, which she will have stored up; she'll also serve her by being more punctual in giving her what she needs at the proper time, moved as she will be by the desire to please God and to serve Him in His members, who are the poor. And do you think, Sister, that God doesn't communicate himself to a poor Daughter of Charity, who, before becoming one, had very little education and scarcely knew who God was; a poor girl who perhaps had never done anything but work in the fields? You should know, Sisters, that these are the souls to whom God communicates himself most intimately and efficaciously. From the day they put themselves, once and for all, into the hands of God, and devote themselves to know, love, and serve Him, these souls are raised up, and His Goodness communicates greater knowledge to them.@

ABut what do they learn, Monsieur, and what instructions do they receive in the Company?@

AUnderstand, Sisters, that even if you had no other instructions than these occasional conferences, you=d have enough to enable you to reach a high degree of virtue and of the knowledge of God, provided you made good use of them; yes, that would suffice. There are souls--but good, holy souls--who need only one word to give them a profound knowledge of God. We have an example of this at our house; I'm speaking of a poor farmer from the mountains of Auvergne. All his life he had only worked at plowing and at tending goats and, while doing this, he communed with God in such a way that he spoke of Him as well as any Prelate, theologian, or anyone else could have done; and I don't ever expect to hear anyone speak so well. And where was he instructed? In a sermon to which he had given all his attention, and on which he had subsequently meditated; and God, who delights in simple, humble souls, had communicated himself lavishly to him.

AIf God granted this grace to a poor peasant who plowed fields and tended his father's goats, do you think He'll refuse it to a Daughter of Charity, who gives and consecrates herself to Him to serve Him in His members and who, at her work, collects, like a bee, the honey of the sacred words she has heard at a conference, a sermon, an instruction, or in an admonition from her

Superioress or some Officer? Oh! there's no doubt, Sisters, that those who are on this road will go far in a short time; if they wander away from it, they'll come back, and you'll see them increase in virtue like the dawn, which is only a dot at sunrise but keeps on growing in fullness until midday.

ABelieve me, Sisters, lowliness doesn't keep the Son of God at a distance from us; He has no need of grandeur; He is grandeur itself, but He wants simple, humble hearts, and, when He finds them, how wonderful it is to see Him make His home in them! In Holy Scripture He glories that His delight is to converse with the lowly. Yes, Sisters, God's pleasure, His joy, His satisfaction, so to speak, is to be with the humble and simple who are conscious of their lowliness. What a great incentive for hope and consolation for us, and what a great motive for humbling ourselves!

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think you=re obligated by the instructions given at the conferences?@

ABecause God, who causes them to be given to us, will demand an account of us, if we don't benefit from them.@

AYou=re quite right to fear that God will demand an account of you, Sister, because it's His word. How attentively would we not listen to a messenger coming to us from the King or from some great nobleman! That thought, that word to which Sister refers are the thought and the word of God. And shouldn't we have good reason to fear, if we don't set great store by His word and the value it deserves?

ASister, please tell us something more on this.@ The Sister read her notes, which contained the following: AThe first reason I see for profiting from the instructions given to us at the conferences is that God will be glorified by it and instructs us on how to live our vocation with greater virtue and perfection. Another reason is so that we may advance in virtue and acquire knowledge both for ourselves and for our neighbor. Another idea that occurred to me is that the conferences are the school of Jesus Christ, to which He is calling us when our Superiors tell us to come. We should therefore come to them with a great desire to profit from them because, without this desire, we would never benefit from them. Another means is to listen to them very attentively; another is to reflect often on them and discuss them with one another.@

Another Sister was questioned and said that one reason obliging us to profit from the conferences is that in them we are instructed on our Rules. Another motive is that if we don't benefit from them, it is to be feared that Our Lord may abandon us to ourselves and leave us without instruction, as He commanded the Apostles to do in regard to those cities that refused to listen to them. One means of profiting from them is to put into practice immediately whatever we=ve heard at them.

Another Sister said that, since the conferences were suggested by the Holy Spirit, there's reason to believe that nothing except what we=re obliged to know and practice will be treated at them. Another reason is that, if we neglect them, God will demand a very exact account from us, since they are means He has given us for going to Him and which we might not have used. The means for that are: to have great respect for the conferences; to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit before and after hearing them, that it may please the Spirit to imprint on our hearts what we=ve heard; and when occasions arise for practicing the virtue or shunning the vice that has been treated, to remember what has been said so as to be strengthened by it.

When Mademoiselle was asked to share the inspirations God had given her on the matter, she said that one reason for profiting from the instructions given at the conferences was that, when God saw that we were disregarding the instructions He gives himself by His graces and holy

inspirations, or through our Guardian Angels, He allowed our Superiors to warn us of the faults into which we might fall and to show us the road we should follow to attain the perfection of our state. If we neglect this grace, it is to be feared that His Goodness may withdraw it and we might remain without inspiration. This would be a great misfortune for each one in particular, given the danger of loss of a vocation, and for the whole Company in general, which would be on the verge of ruin. We would also deprive our neighbors of the help they should expect from us, and this would cause us to be unfaithful to God's graces. The better to convince ourselves of this, we should reflect that, since these words come from God, we should esteem them as we esteem God himself, and not allow a single one of them slip by without profiting from it. Another means is to come with a great desire to become better, and for this purpose, before the conference we should ardently ask the Holy Spirit for this grace, so that, with the help of the Spirit, we may listen to it faithfully and attentively; afterward we should discuss it among ourselves and reflect on it often.

Several other Sisters were questioned, all of whom said in different terms almost exactly what is given above. For this reason we won't report here what they said, but only what Most Honored Father said.

ASisters, I thank God for the insights He has given you on the present subject, but before going back to the thoughts you had, it's apropos that you know the origin of conferences and for how long they=ve been in use. You know, Sisters, that Our Lord used conferences for the establishment of His Church. From the day He brought His Apostles together, He gave them conferences; then, when His company had grown larger and had Apostles and disciples, He sometimes held meetings with them. It was during such a conference that Saint Philip, whose feast we celebrate today, said to Our Lord, >Lord, you are speaking to us of your Father, but show us your Father,= and Our Lord replied, >Whoever sees me, sees my Father; my Father and I are one.=[1]

AThe Apostles presented their difficulties at these conferences, and Our Lord responded to them. He spoke of the spread of His Church and the means God would use to make it flourish. So we may say, dear Sisters--and it's a fact-- that Jesus Christ himself instituted the conferences, and made use of them for the beginning, growth, and perfection of His Church. After His death and glorious Ascension, the faithful were instructed by His Apostles and priests, who used no other method than the conference. There were no sermons; when the Christians were assembled, the conference began.

AAfter the Apostles, and for a very long time in the early Church, the use of conferences was continued; but the number of Christians became so large that it would have been difficult to instruct them in this way, so preaching in public was begun. Conferences continued to be held among Church leaders: the priests, deacons, and others who were involved in establishing it. From this, we rightly conclude that we should have a high--a very high--opinion of conferences, since they were instituted by Jesus Christ himself, who used them with His Apostles for the establishment of the great kingdom of the Church, which has reached the stage we now see. After long use, He allowed this custom to be abandoned for a time; in our own day He permits it to be renewed and gives us this means for our growth, as it was used for the growth of the Church. What a great grace, what great mercy of God, Sisters, that in the Company of the Daughters of Charity this blessing exists of being able to do among ourselves what Our Lord did with His Apostles!

AThe second thing to note is that Our Lord is in the midst of us when we=re assembled for His glory; we can have no doubt of this, for He says so himself: >When two of you are gathered

in my name, I will be in your midst.=[2] Now, dear Sisters, if God promises His presence to two, all the more reason will He give it to the whole Company, made up of a great number who assemble in His name and for love of Him to strive to work for His glory. Assuming this to be the case, we must conclude that this action is of very great importance for the glory of God and our own progress, and that we must participate in it with the intention of pleasing God and of receiving the instruction He has someone give us there, so we can put it into practice and be pleasing to Him.

AWith the intention of pleasing Him, because it's His word. Speaking to Superiors, he says, >Whoever hears you, hears me.=[3] For it's not the word of your Superior, alas! a poor miserable man! Oh, no! it's the word of God, who deigns by him or by her who speaks (because you can be instructed by a Sister--yes, by a Sister), who deigns, I say, by this means to help you to understand your obligations. And with respect, because He is present; He sees and hears you, and notes how we accept what He has someone say to us. That being the case, dear Sisters--first, that conferences go back to the time of Jesus Christ and, second, that when we=re gathered together, He's in the midst of us--you must know that, in order to make us know and understand how greatly we should esteem His holy word, Our Lord replied to a good woman who said to Him, >Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you,= >More blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.=[4]

AYou see how Our Lord values His word, Sisters. He admits that His mother is blessed to have borne Him, a mother chosen by God from all eternity to be the mother of His Son, a mother blessed among all women, who proclaims that God has done great things in her and that all generations will call her blessed; yet Our Lord places above such a mother >those who hear His word and keep it.=

ASo, Sisters, it should be a great joy for us when we hear that there's an opportunity to listen to this sacred word, the word of life, the word of eternal life. When the notice is brought that your Superiors are informing you that a conference will be held on a certain day, how you should rejoice among yourselves, Sisters! The first Sister to hear or to receive the note should say to the next one she meets, >I have good news for you, Sister. We'll have a conference tomorrow; my God, we'll hear Your holy word from the mouth of our Superiors or of our Sisters. It will be Your word, my God, for You will inspire them.=

ATo explain to us the difference among the people who hear His word, Our Lord declares in the Gospel that the word of God is like the seed the farmer sows in his field. Some, He says, falls by the wayside and the birds come and devour it, it is trodden underfoot by the passersby, and thus produces no fruit. Another portion falls among stones; it brings forth a few little leaves, but withers away before producing any fruit and, like the first, is a loss to its owner. A third portion falls among thorns and, instead of taking root, is choked immediately, and remains as sterile as the others. The fourth falls on good ground, finds good soil, and springs up, takes root, increases, and multiplies in such a way that one grain yields a hundredfold, or at least sixty.[5]

AOur Lord wanted to show us in this the difference among persons who go to conferences. All actually go to them, but it's to be feared that the same thing happens as in the case of the sower's seed. This beautiful seed of the word of God is scattered into the hearts of all who hear it; this beautiful word, this holy, life-giving word is intended to serve as food for all persons. It's like the seed the sower plants, which would become nourishing food if it found everywhere a fertile soil in which it could fructify.

AThere are souls who hear the word of God and receive it, but the birds of the air, which are

distractions, carry it off immediately, like the seed that falls by the wayside and nothing of it remains because it didn't have time to take root there. As soon as it's heard, it's lost because the first thought that entered their mind diverted attention from it. Others receive it into their hearts and speak of it occasionally; but, because their hearts haven't been prepared by mortification, they are like hard, unplowed ground. The seed has indeed sprouted and produced a few leaves, but it quickly withers away without bearing any fruit. Other souls are like the seed that falls among thorns. They do, indeed, receive the divine word, but the cares, worries, and restlessness with which they are filled choke the word they=ve received; for, since their mind is too filled with cares, they=re not nourished by this holy food.

AIt's true, dear Sisters, that you must go to the sick to bring them their medicines, the neighborhood is spread out, and the number of patients is very great, but it's also true that this shouldn't hinder the practice of your Rules and especially your mental prayer, which prepares you to receive the word of God with fruit and profit. There are good souls among you, filled with esteem for the word of God, and convinced of their need to be humble, submissive, mortified, serene, and not restless or fretful, living in a holy joy founded on God and tending toward God. Ah, Sisters! these souls are like good soil, thoroughly plowed and tilled, that receives the seed, gives it the necessary sap, and causes it to bring forth fruit in due season. By the grace of God, there are some of these among you--I won't say how many--but, by the grace of God, the number is large. Take care, Sisters, that each of you may be in this number; act in such a way that this divine word may find good soil in which to take root.

ASince this is so, Sisters, why should we benefit from the conferences and instructions that are given us? You=ve said, >because God speaks by the mouth of those who are questioned. God has promised to communicate himself to the humble and lowly and to reveal His secrets to them.= Why, then, shouldn't we believe that what is said comes from God, since it's said by the lowly to the lowly? Yes, Sisters, God takes such pleasure that we can say that His great pleasure is to reveal himself to the humble. What beautiful words of Jesus Christ, which show clearly that it's not in palaces like the Louvre nor in the residences of Princes that God takes His delight! He says so in Scripture, >O Father, I praise and thank you that you have hidden your mysteries from the great ones of the world and revealed them to the humble.=[6] He doesn't look for pomp or external display but takes pleasure in a humble soul, in a soul taught by him alone and makes no account of worldly knowledge. What a motive, Sisters, for loving the conferences, since it's there that God reveals His secrets to you and shows you the means for your growth!

AIf we discuss a virtue, someone will give one motive, and another, another; this Sister will give one means, that one, another; and God wants each of you to be inspired by all the motives mentioned and instructed by all the means suggested. >But it's a Sister who gave this motive and that means.= No matter! It's God acting through her; it's God who communicated them to her; it's from Him they come and, because they=re from God, they should be precious to you, and you should take careful note of them.

AThe third reason, stated so well, is the help we get from these instructions for our conduct. A Daughter of Charity will be in the home of a Lady, a sick person, or someone else, and there an opportunity will present itself to practice the virtue of modesty or to put up with something repugnant to nature; she remembers something she heard at a conference; ah! she'll be energized and will experience no more difficulty. She'll have had some slight disagreement with her Sister, and the devil will try to dissuade her from humbling herself, but she'll recall having heard at a conference how pleasing an act of humility is to God; she'll go and cast herself at the feet of her

Sister, and both of them will profit from the conference they heard a long time ago; so true it is that conferences are extremely necessary and very profitable.

AIf you ask me what can maintain each of you individually, dear Sisters, I'll answer that it's prayer, for it's the daily manna that comes down from heaven. But, you see, if you ask me what will maintain the entire Company, it's the conference. Nothing will give the Community more light, nothing will give it greater instruction; nothing will raise it up more quickly from its falls and prevent it from committing faults than the conferences. That's the way God speaks to you, that's how His guidance is revealed to you and His ways made known. You should praise God, Sisters, for having begun to participate in the conferences and for having been chosen for this because, as I=ve told you, conferences were no longer in use, and you=ve been raised up to restore them. Be very careful not to misuse them, Sisters.

ABefore going any further I'll tell you--for it's necessary for you to know this--that if you find no benefit in prayer, you won't profit much from the conferences. You see, dear Sisters, gardeners take the time twice a day to water the plants in their gardens because without this assistance they would wither away during very hot weather. On the contrary, thanks to this watering, they draw their nourishment from the soil because a certain humor coming from this watering rises from the roots, flows through the stem, and gives life to the branches and leaves and savor to the fruit.

In the same way, dear Sisters, we are like those poor gardens in which drought causes all the plants to die, unless the gardener's care and hard work make provision for this. That's why you have the holy custom of mental prayer which, like a gentle dew, moistens your soul every morning by the grace it draws from God. When you=re worn out by encounters and difficulties, you have again, in the afternoon, this salutary refreshment, which continuously invigorates all your actions. How beneficial this will be for a Daughter of Charity in a short space of time, if she is careful to refresh herself with this sacred dew! You'll see her growing day by day in holiness, just as the gardener sees his plants growing day by day, and in a short time she'll advance like the beautiful dawn that rises in the morning and goes on increasing until noon. In this way, Sisters, she'll go on until she has reached the Sun of Justice, who is the light of the world, and be swallowed up in Him, as the dawn is lost in the sun. For all these reasons you yourselves have mentioned and which God suggested to you, dear Sisters, perhaps you=ve been fully persuaded of the importance of these talks.

ALet's go on to the second point. Someone was perfectly right to say that, to profit from them, we must value them. What we=ve already said on the first point has helped us to understand how we should value this custom. What should be done next? That also has been mentioned, by the grace of God; both the motives and the accompanying means to make good use of instructions were given. It was stated that we should pray at the beginning. What an excellent means, Sisters! You can't imagine how efficacious it is. To offer to God what will be said, to offer Him ourselves to hear and to profit from it, to offer Him all those present and to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit and of our Guardian Angels and the other ones who are there, so that what is said may be imprinted on our heart by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that we may be faithful to it by the ministry of our Guardian Angels; to make a profound act of humility before God, to acknowledge our unworthiness to participate in this benefit because of the misuse we=ve made of God's graces, and to take the resolution to put them to quite a different use in future.

AThe second means is to listen carefully and with close attention to the sacred words of God that come from the mouth of those in whom He has placed them and, while listening, to raise our

soul often to God to ask Him for the grace to profit from them. My God, I hear what is being said, but if You don't give that grace to my heart, this divine seed won't germinate in it. Furthermore, dear Sisters, we should be edified by everything, because we should beware of judging and of saying, >This or that Sister said that, but she doesn't do it,= or >This one spoke better than that one,= or >That was poorly expressed.= *O mon Dieu*! dear Sisters, let's avoid such conduct like a poison the infernal serpent wants to inject into the Company; let's protect ourselves from it as from death and hell. For each of you to take for yourself the instructions given us there, you have to listen humbly and simply and not behave like persons who go to a sermon with no devotion. They listen if the preacher speaks well. If he gives a reprimand for vices, instead of correcting themselves, they say, >How well his remarks apply to Such and Such!= or >He really told that one off!= and never do they apply anything to themselves. So they'll go to sermons all their lives without making any amendment and, unless God works a miracle, in the end they'll die miserably in their sins.

AA third means is to strive to remember well what you heard. It's said of the Blessed Virgin that she kept the words of her Son in her heart;[7] she drank them in and afterward meditated on them, so that she lost nothing of what He said. Now, just imagine, dear Sisters, if the Blessed Virgin, who discussed and shared so much with God; to whom the sacred mysteries were revealed and who never lost sight of the presence of God; if, I say, with all these natural and supernatural lights, in which she certainly surpassed all other creatures, she still stored up carefully the sacred words of her Son, what should we not do to try to preserve in our hearts the eloquence of this sacred word! Balm, which is an extremely sweet and fragrant liquid, never loses its perfume, provided it's kept in a closed container, because, if it isn't tightly stoppered, the perfume evaporates and you'll no longer find anything in it.

AThe fourth means to profit from the conferences is, as has already been said, to discuss them among yourselves. This is a very worthwhile means because, by these conversations, your hearts will be gradually imbued with what you say, you'll incite one another to practice them, and the Sisters with whom you speak will be edified and instructed, and will instruct others. In that way, you'll benefit and you'll help your neighbor to benefit. When opportunities present themselves, recall what you=ve heard. >*Mon Dieu*! Sister, do you remember that Sister X said that at the conference?= When you visit one another, refresh each other's memory with what you recall.

ADear Sisters, how beneficial this will be for you! It's incredible; you have to experience it. When we go to give a mission in the country we sometimes meet fathers of families who are totally ignorant, or others who know just a little, and when we ask the latter, >How come you=re better instructed than others?= they reply, >It's because my son goes to school, Monsieur; he learns the catechism, and when he comes home he repeats it to us and, in that way we learn something.= You see, Sisters, fathers learn from their children and are pleased to be taught by them. And why shouldn't we be glad to learn what we don't know?

ATo all these means I'll add another, dear Sisters, namely, to put into practice faithfully what we=ve heard, and to do it without delay because, when we put something off, we forget, we grow slack, and everything is lost. As soon as we=ve made a firm, strong resolution to make good use of the instructions we=ve heard, let's show by our works that we=ve profited from them, and we'll draw down the blessings of heaven for our renewed progress. On this topic Our Lord said, *Habenti dabitur*[8]: God will give to the one who has made good use of what He has given Him. Nothing, dear Sisters, draws down God's graces more to do good than to be faithful to this and to put it into practice once we know it; while, on the contrary, nothing keeps the soul back more

than infidelity. Sisters, do you know how God acts toward a soul that spurns His graces? He withdraws them, then the soul falls into hardness of heart; after that, aversion; and, finally, into a state in which it's no longer possible to do anything. The result is that the soul not only loses the grace offered to it--which is a great loss--but also the virtues it had, and remains deprived of all reinforcement, not knowing what to decide nor which way to turn. May it please God in His goodness to preserve the Company from this deplorable state and to make it faithful to the practice of doing good!

AI exhort you with all my heart, dear Sisters, by the sacred love of the Son of God, who takes His delight among you, who came into the world, worked, prayed, sweat, kept vigil, and died only to give us the example of what we should do, I exhort you, I repeat, by the incomprehensible love He has for you, to set to work immediately to put into practice what you=ve heard; and rest assured that this is one of the most efficacious means you could find to benefit from the blessing God presents to you. Believe me, Sisters, our happiness depends absolutely on our fidelity in this matter because, by profiting from what we=ve already done, we draw down a blessing on all our actions; and, by losing no opportunity, we'll grow from virtue to virtue, like that beautiful dawn that goes on ever increasing from morning until noon.

AI entreat Our Lord Jesus Christ, who made use of conferences for the establishment, development, and perfection of His Church, that the graces with which He will shower you may serve to increase and perfect the virtue He wants to place in you. I entreat Him also that the fidelity each of you will bring to these graces may always draw fresh ones in order to work more and more for the relief of your neighbor in the way He asks of you for His greater glory. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .@

37. - MENTAL PRAYER

May 31, 1648

ASisters, the topic of this conference is mental prayer. The first point concerns the reasons for never failing to make meditation daily; the second deals with the thoughts God has given you on the coming of the Holy Spirit. With regard to the first point, Sisters, you have to consider the reasons why it's good and even necessary for a Daughter of Charity not to fail to make her meditation daily; the advantages that will accrue to her from it if she makes it; and the losses she will experience if she doesn=t.

ASister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this?@

AOn the first point, it seemed to me that, after Holy Communion, prayer is the food of the soul; and as we need food for the body daily, so do we need spiritual food for the health of our soul. The second reason is that in prayer we learn God's Will, we advance in perfection, we gather strength to resist temptations, and we are affirmed in our vocation; lastly, that's where our soul has the happiness of speaking heart to heart with God. On the contrary, when we haven't made our prayer, we become weak, and we don't experience God's presence during the day.

AOn the second point, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit, I thought that, to be worthy to have the Holy Spirit come to us, we must be closely united among ourselves and have only one heart, so that we may represent better the union of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, and rid all the powers of our souls of inordinate affections so that the Holy Spirit may find room to fill them with His gifts and graces. In addition, we must have deep humility and interior peace because the God of peace resides only in a peaceful place. We'll know that we=ve received Him when we find ourselves more loving and more open to the acquisition of virtue. I recognized that I'm far removed from these preparations, and I=ve taken the resolution to work at that, with the

grace of the Holy Spirit.@

APlease tell us your thoughts on this topic, Sister.@

AFather, one reason not to fail to make our meditation daily is the need we have for strength to combat our natural inclination to evil, and the obligation we=re under to correspond to God's plan for our sanctification, for which He gives us the means in prayer.@

AAnd you, Sister, will you tell us what you thought?@

AOn the first point I thought that Our Lord made use of prayer throughout His holy life and practiced it from childhood, for He often went apart from His relatives to pray in the Temple of Jerusalem. Another time, when He wanted to select His Apostles, He had recourse to prayer, and He continued this practice until His death on the Cross. Since the Son of God has shown us the example, we must imitate Him. Another reason is that prayer brings us closer to God and unites us to Him by the practice of the resolutions we make during it. A third reason is that a Daughter of Charity who doesn't pray every day couldn't be pleasing to God nor persevere for long in her vocation; and she can't be a true Daughter of Charity, since it's in prayer that we find the strength to be sustained in the service of God and our neighbor.

AOn the coming of the Holy Spirit, I thought that if we want to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in prayer, we must have great love for this practice and be faithful to it daily until death, as the food of our soul and its daily bread. Reflecting that, after the Apostles had received the Holy Spirit they were completely changed and spoke new languages, I felt that I would recognize having received the Holy Spirit if, in my words or by my actions, I spoke a completely different language, refrained from the many useless words I so often say through flightiness, and stopped giving bad example to my Sisters.@

ASister, would you please tell us what God has given you regarding this theme?@

AI thought on the first point that Our Lord said that His house was a house of prayer, and since He has given us the grace of calling us to His service, we must be faithful to prayer so as not to act contrary to what should be done in God's house.

(2) ASince prayer is the food of the soul, if we fail to make it, our soul is in danger of growing weak, just as the body does when we don't eat.

(3) ATo make our meditation is to do what the angels and saints do in heaven; in prayer the soul speaks lovingly and familiarly with God, from which it will infallibly fall away if it neglects this holy exercise.

(4) APrayer withdraws us from sin, for if we communicate daily with God, how could we develop a habit of sin, which God detests so intensely? If we do fall into sin God gives us in prayer the grace to recognize it, as well as the strength to rise from it. Consequently, it's impossible for a soul, faithful and exact in the practice of prayer, not to advance in virtue.

(5) AGod gives us daily in prayer sufficient grace to work at our advancement and helps us to see what is suitable for us to achieve it, or what we have to avoid.@

AFor my meditation today, I thought on the words, >When the day of Pentecost came,=[1] and how faithful God is to His promises, without, however, changing the orders of His foreknowledge, as is apparent in this mystery, which was fulfilled only at the time God had ordained it, although it might have seemed that the Holy Spirit should have descended upon the Apostles as soon as Our Lord ascended into heaven, so as not to leave them without some consolation. And yet, it seemed afterward that the delay was very profitable to them in causing them to appreciate, through the inconveniences of the deprivation, the favor they were awaiting, and to prepare them for it. This made me resolve to love and adore that Divine Providence which

orders all things for our good, and to entrust myself to its renewed concern.

(2) AI thought about the joy the Blessed Virgin experienced when she felt herself so filled with the sacred love of the Father and the Son, which had brought about in her the Mystery of the Incarnation, and the thanksgiving and offering of herself she made to God once again. I also considered the joy of the Apostles, who felt quite different from what they had felt previously, and also the courage that animated them, since, from that time on, they exercised their ministry fearlessly. I turned to the Blessed Virgin, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, to ask her to obtain from Him that He might take possession of my heart and enkindle in it His sacred love.

(3) AI thought of the great gift God made to the Church by the Holy Spirit, who is Love itself. He willed that, after receiving this Spirit it should begin to appear publicly, to teach us all that, as true children of the Church, we must be united by true, holy affection. I asked this Holy Spirit to bestow on me His fruits and gifts, to work in me the true effects of His love, and to destroy the self-love that until now has been my master, and which I have resolved to combat, aided by His grace and assistance.@

A few other Sisters said substantially the same things, so we are omitting them. Because Most Honored Father was in a big hurry, he cut short the questions His Charity usually asks most of the Sisters, and questioned Mademoiselle, who replied, AOn the first point of our prayer, I thought that one reason we should never omit making our prayer is its excellence, since when we pray we are speaking to God. And I saw great advantages in this, since in prayer God helps us to realize His goodness in abasing himself to this degree and in raising us up as He does. Another reason is the recommendation the Son of God gave so many times, by word and example, of praying to God His Father, both in vocal prayer, which He himself taught us, and in mental prayer, reminding us that God wants to be served in spirit and in truth. A third reason is that, since prayer is a gift of God, we must do our utmost to obtain it, not only because of the great help we may gain from it, but also because of the esteem we must have for the Giver.

AThe second point is on the thoughts God gave us in our prayer today. My mind was occupied with the promise the Son of God has made to those who love and keep His Commandments. I saw how both of these are just, and God produced in me acts of the will, giving me profound gratitude for having been honored with this freedom, seeing my absolute unworthiness in every sense. I thought that the effect of this promise was brought home fully to us today, the day the Holy Spirit was sent to the Church by the Father and the Son, for this surely makes it clear to us that the Holy Trinity dwells in us, and that it's on this day that the children of the Church became adopted children of God.

AThis coming and indwelling of God in us is marked by a fullness of gifts and graces. I desired to consent to this and am determined to work harder than ever at removing the hindrances my senses and passions may place to it, so that I may participate in that fullness evident in the Apostles. Their understanding was enlightened and filled with the knowledge necessary for their vocation, their memory fully refreshed by the words and actions of the Son of God, and their will on fire with His love and love of their neighbor. The Holy Spirit, acting powerfully by this plenitude in them, helped them to tell and teach efficaciously the greatness and love of God. I greatly desired to glorify God in His wonderful works, to give myself to Him so that in and through me He might do His most holy Will, though the truth makes me see my weaknesses and infidelities, which cause me to offend Him so often and to thwart His plans. And what I really fear is that all this might hinder the graces the goodness of God would pour upon the Community if I were different, for which I humbly ask His pardon, and because I was so bold

(she knelt down) as to have chosen the topic of the conference without having your express permission, Most Honored Father.@

Most Honored Father had her get up and began as follows: AThe first reason--or one of them--given on the importance and great benefit of making your prayer every day is that Our Lord recommended it very often to His Apostles and disciples, when He taught them how they were to act after His death. >Turn to my Father,= He told them, >ask my Father; whatever you ask the Father in my name, will be granted you.=[2] And what He says to His disciples, Sisters, He says to us. Shouldn't we have great respect for this recommendation of the Son of God, which is so beneficial to us, since it gives us the freedom to turn to God in prayer? Shouldn't we give ourselves to Him in order never to fail in it? You must take great care, Sisters, to avoid all the obstacles that may arise at the time of prayer, with which nature is sometimes pleased. When that happens, however, and you become aware of it, stir yourselves up by the recommendation Jesus Christ gave regarding it. >My God, you recommended that I pray, and would I be so cowardly as to exempt myself from it? Yes! I'll go!= All of you will experience how powerful this motive is, Sisters, and the benefits that will come to you from it.

ATo that I add another: it has been judged well for you to make it every day, and your Rules prescribe this. I will go further, Sisters; if you can, pray every hour, or even never stop praying at all, for meditation is so excellent that we can never make it too much; and the more we do, the more we want to make it, when we seek God there. Consequently, Sisters, because it's stated in your Rules that you=re bound to pray, try as far as possible never to miss it. And if the medicine you have to distribute in the morning at the time of prayer hinders you, find some other time, and arrange matters so as to present yourselves to God for that purpose.

AA second motive mentioned was the confidence that should animate us when we pray, based on the promises of the Son of God that it will have its reward. >Ask,= He said, >and you shall receive.= There are certain people, naturally timid and fearful, who dare not propose anything for fear of being rebuffed, or ask for anything for fear of being refused. Jesus Christ wanted to give every assurance that we'll be welcomed by His Father when we pray to Him. He wasn't satisfied with making a simple promise, although that was more than sufficient, but He said, >Amen I say to you, that whatever you ask in my name will be granted to you.= In this confidence, then, dear Sisters, shouldn't we take every care not to lose the graces God in His goodness intends to give us in prayer, if we make it as it should be made?

AAnother reason brought forward is that Our Lord himself was a man of the greatest prayer; and it was pointed out that from His early childhood He went apart from the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph to pray to God His Father. In the whole course of His laborious life, He was careful and very exact about praying. People saw Him deliberately go to Jerusalem; He went apart from His disciples to pray; and He went into the desert for no other purpose. *O mon Dieu*! How often did He not prostrate himself there face downward on the ground! With what humility did He present himself to God His Father, burdened with the sins of the world! Lastly, He prayed even when exhausted by the fasting to which He subjected himself. But His chief and constant exercise was prayer. On the night of His Passion, He again separated himself from His disciples to pray; and it is said that He went apart to the garden, where He often used to go to pray. He prayed there with such fervor and devotion that, as you know, His body sweat blood and water from the efforts He made. So, Sisters, I repeat what I=ve already said; I'm just saying the same thing over again because I'm in a hurry. By the first motive we see that Jesus Christ recommended that we make our prayer; by the second we see that He puts His faith in us and

lovingly urges us to make it; and by the third, we have the example He gave us, for He was never content with words. He acted, He did what He wanted us to do, and He never willed anything except for our greater good.

AFrom all I=ve just said, dear Sisters, you can see the importance of prayer, since it was recommended, taught, and practiced by the Son of God, and how useful it is to the soul. Moreover, it has been said, and rightly so, that what food is to the body, prayer is to the soul, and if someone was satisfied with taking one meal every three or four days, he=d soon grow weak and be in great danger of death; or, if he lived, he=d languish, incapable of doing anything useful, and in the end would become a carcass lacking strength or vigor. Consequently, it has been said, a soul that isn't nourished by prayer--or rarely so--becomes lukewarm, languid, without strength, courage, or virtue, a source of annoyance to others and unbearable to himself.

AIt has been pointed out clearly that it's by prayer that vocation is preserved, because it's true, Sisters, that a Daughter of Charity can't survive if she doesn't pray. It's impossible for her to persevere. She'll last for a short time, but at length the world will get the upper hand. She'll find her ministry too hard because she doesn't take this holy refreshment. She'll become listless and bored, and, in the end, she'll leave. And why do you think so many have lost their vocation, Sisters? It's because they neglected prayer.

AIt was also said that prayer is the soul of our souls--that is, what the soul is to the body, prayer is to the soul. Now, the soul gives life to the body, causing it to move, walk, speak, and do all that's necessary. If the body had no soul, it would be a contaminated corpse, fit only for burial. Now, Sisters, the soul without prayer is almost like that body without a soul in what concerns the service of God; it's without feeling or movement, and has only worldly desires. I add to that, dear Sisters, that prayer is like a mirror in which the soul sees all its stains and disfigurements; it notes what makes it displeasing to God; it sees itself in Him; it arranges itself to be conformable to Him in all things. Fashionable ladies won't leave home without looking at themselves in their mirror to see that nothing is out of place and nothing offends propriety. Some of them are even so vain as to carry mirrors at their belts so they can take an occasional glance to see if anything has happened that needs adjustment. Now, Sisters, isn't it reasonable that, what fashionable people do to please the world, those who serve God should do to please God? They should never leave home without looking at themselves in their mirror. God wants those who serve Him to look at themselves, but in holy meditation, so that every day and often during the day, by means of interior glances and aspirations, they may see whatever in them may be displeasing to God and ask pardon for it and the grace to rid themselves of it.

ASomeone also said that it's in prayer that God lets us know what He wants us to do and to avoid; and that's true, dear Sisters, for there's no action in life that helps us to know ourselves better, nor shows God's Will to us more clearly than prayer. When the holy Fathers speak of prayer, they are exultant; they say that it's a Fountain of Youth in which the soul is rejuvenated. Philosophers say that among the secrets of nature there's a spring called the Fountain of Youth, where old men who drink water from it become young again. Be that as it may, we know that there are other springs whose waters are very beneficial to one's health. But prayer rejuvenates the soul far more truly than the Fountain of Youth mentioned by the philosophers rejuvenates the body. In prayer your soul, weakened by bad habits, becomes very dynamic; that's where it recovers its sight, where previously it had become blind; ears once deaf to the voice of God are opened to good inspirations; and the heart receives renewed strength, feeling energized by a courage it hadn't experienced before. That's why a poor country woman, who comes to you

lacking refinement, not knowing how to read, and unfamiliar with the mysteries of religion, changes radically in a short time and becomes reserved, recollected, and filled with love of God. And what else but prayer brings all that about? It's a Fountain of Youth in which she has been rejuvenated; it's from there that she has drawn the graces that are apparent in her, making her as you now see her.

AThere are two sorts of prayer: mental and vocal. Vocal is made with words; mental is made without words, but with the heart and the mind. When Moses led the people of Israel into battle, while they were fighting he stood before God with hands outstretched to heaven. As long as he did this the people defeated their enemies, but as soon as Moses stopped holding his hands uplifted, they began to lose. What wonderful power of mental prayer, Sisters, for that was what Moses was doing with his hands uplifted to heaven, without saying a word, and it was potent enough to win the battle for those for whom he was praying!

AHoly Scripture also tells us that one day Moses went before God, and didn't say a word. And he heard the voice of God saying, >Moses, you=re driving me crazy; you=re forcing me to do what I don't want to do. This people is ungrateful and rebellious to my law; I want to destroy them, and you want me to save them. Why do you force me? Go away, and let me do what I want.=[3] Please see, Sisters, how constrained God feels by prayer--and by mental prayer--for Moses didn't say a word, yet his prayer was heard so well that God said to him, >You=re driving me crazy; you want me to do what I don't want to do.=

APrayer, Sisters, is a lifting of the mind to God, by which the soul detaches itself from itself, as it were, to go to seek God in himself. It's a conversation of the soul with God, a mutual communication in which God tells the soul interiorly what He wants it to know and do, and in which the soul says to its God what He himself helps it to know it should request. What great excellence, and one that should cause us to esteem and prefer it to everything else!

APrayer is mental or vocal. Vocal prayer, made with words, is divided into three kinds: prayer of obligation, prayer of devotion, and sacramental prayer. Vocal prayer of obligation is the Office that priests have to say. Vocal prayer of devotion is what each individual makes according to the impulse God gives him or her, such as the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the Stations of the Cross, litanies, Vespers, etc., which are said not by obligation but by devotion. Sacramental vocal prayer is the one that priests say during Holy Mass, as laid down by the holy Canons.

ASo much for vocal prayer, Sisters. Although said in words, it should never be made without raising the mind to God and with great attention to what is being said. Praying is natural; we see that with children, and their little prayers are so pleasing to God that some theologians say He takes immense pleasure in them. A great man, the late Bishop of Geneva, held children in such veneration that when he saw them he would guide their hand and have himself blessed by them. I mention this only in passing, because time presses, and this isn't the type of prayer we have to deal with now.

AMental prayer is made in two ways: one by understanding, and the other by the will. Prayer of understanding occurs when, after hearing the reading, the mind is reawakened in the presence of God and then is occupied with seeking to know the meaning of the mystery proposed, in seeing the lesson proper to it, and in producing affections of seeking good or avoiding evil. And although the will produces these acts, this is still called prayer of understanding, because its chief function, which is the search, is done by the understanding, which is occupied primarily with the subject put before it. This is ordinarily called meditation. Everyone can make it, each

according to his or her ability and the inspiration God gives.

AThe other type of prayer is called contemplation. In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing but receive what He gives. It doesn't act and, with no effort on the part of the soul, God himself inspires it with everything it may be seeking, and much more. Haven't you ever experienced this sort of prayer, dear Sisters? I'm sure you=ve done so very often in your retreats, when you=ve been amazed that, with no contribution on your part, God himself filled your mind and imprinted on it knowledge that you never had.

ANow, in both these ways God imparts many excellent inspirations to His servants. In prayer He enlightens their understanding of many truths incomprehensible to everyone else but those who devote themselves to prayer; it's there that He inflames the will; lastly, it's in prayer that He takes total possession of hearts and souls. Now, you must know, dear Sisters, that, even though educated people may have a greater disposition for making meditation, and many succeed in it and may have, of themselves, minds open to many inspirations, God's conversations with humble souls are quite different. *Confiteor tibi, Pater*, etc., said Our Lord. >I thank you, Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise of this world, and have revealed them to the little and the humble.=[4]

ASisters, it's into hearts without worldly knowledge, who seek God in himself, that He's pleased to infuse the most excellent lights and the greatest graces. He reveals to those hearts what all the schools haven't discovered, and unfolds for them mysteries of which the most learned see nothing. And, would you believe, dear Sisters, that we have experience of this among ourselves? I think I=ve told you this twice already, but I'll tell you once more: in our house we have Repetition of Prayer,[5] not every day but sometimes every two days, sometimes every three, as Providence allows. Now, by the grace of God the priests make it well and so do the seminarians--some better, some worse, according to what God communicates to them--but as for our poor Brothers, God's promise of revealing himself to the humble and to little ones is verified in them, for we=re astounded at the inspirations God gives them; and it certainly seems that they come from Him alone because they have no education. It may be a poor shoemaker, a baker, or a carter, nevertheless they fill us with astonishment. We sometimes talk about it among ourselves, ashamed that we=re not as we see them to be. >Look at that poor Brother,= we say to one another; >didn't you remark the beautiful good thoughts God gave him? Isn't it wonderful? For what he said wasn't said because he learned it beforehand; he knows it from his time of prayer.= What great, incomprehensible goodness of God, to take His delight in communicating with the simple and unlearned to let us see that all the knowledge in the world is only ignorance in comparison with what He shares with those who earnestly seek Him by way of holy prayer!

AAssuming this to be the case, dear Sisters, you and I must take the resolution never to omit making our prayer every day. I say *every day*, Sisters, but if it were possible, I=d say let's never leave it and spend no time without being in prayer; that is, without having our minds raised to God; for, strictly speaking, prayer is, as we=ve said, a lifting of the soul to God. >But meditation keeps me from preparing this medicine, from delivering it, from going to see this patient or that Lady.= No matter, Sisters; your soul will never fail to be always in the presence of God, and will always direct some ardent desire toward Him. Sisters, if you only knew the pleasure God takes in seeing that a poor country woman, a humble Daughter of Charity, is turning lovingly to Him, you=d go to prayer with more confidence than I can encourage you to do. If you only knew the treasures and graces God has planned to share with you! If you only knew how much knowledge you'll draw from it, how much sweetness, how much love! You'll find it all there, dear Sisters,

for it's the fountain and source of all knowledge. How is it that you see illiterate people speaking so well of God, unfolding the mysteries with more knowledge than a theologian? A theologian who has only his theological knowledge speaks of God absolutely in the way his field of learning has taught him, but a person of prayer speaks of Him in a very different way. The difference between the two, Sisters, arises from the fact that one speaks of Him through simple acquired knowledge, and the other through infused knowledge, filled with love, in such a way that, in this circumstance the theologian isn't the most learned one. And he should be silent when a person of prayer is present, for the latter speaks of God very differently than he can do.

AWe=ve seen Brother Antoine[6]--poor Brother Antoine. You knew him, Mademoiselle. Did you ever see anyone speak of God like that man did? As for me, I never saw anything like it, for ten words from his mouth made a greater impression on people's hearts than any number of sermons. What he said was filled with an eloquence that communicated itself so gently to hearts, that people immediately assented to it. And where did he learn that? From some sermons he had heard and meditated on afterward; and God had communicated himself so amply to him that no one ever spoke better of God than he did, and all that through prayer. >Monsieur,= you may say, >we see all that, but teach us. We see how excellent prayer is, how it unites us to God, strengthens us in our vocation, advances us in virtue, detaches us from ourselves, and helps us to love God and our neighbor; but we don't know how to pray. We=re poor women who can scarcely read--some of us, at least. We certainly go to prayer, but we don't understand anything about it, and sometimes we think it would be better if we weren't there. Teach us.=

ASisters, the disciples said to Our Lord, >Teach us how to pray.=[7]And Our Lord said to them, >Say, *Pater noster, qui es in coelis.*=[8] And you, dear Sisters, ask me what to do because you think you=re doing nothing there. Above all else, Sisters, I have to tell you never to abandon it because you think you=re no good at it. Those of you who are newcomers, don't be surprised to see one month, two months, three months, six months go by with no progress; No, no! even a year, two years, or three. But keep going to it, just as if you were doing great things there. Saint Teresa went twenty years without being able to pray. She couldn't understand it. When she went to choir, she=d say, >My God, I'm going because the Rule dictates it, for I'll do nothing there; since, however, it's Your Will, I'll go.= During all those twenty years, though she experienced nothing but distaste, she never once failed in this. And at the end of twenty years, God rewarded her perseverance by giving her such an outstanding gift of prayer that, since the time of the Apostles, no one ever rivaled Saint Teresa. How do you know, Sisters, whether God may want to make Saint Teresas of you? Do you know what reward He wants to give to your perseverance? When you go to prayer, you think you'll do nothing there because you have no taste for it; but you must know, Sisters, that all the virtues are to be found in prayer: first, obedience, of which you make an act at the time prescribed by the Rule; humility, for, thinking you'll make no headway in it will give you a lowly opinion of yourself; then faith, hope, and charity. In a word, Sisters, most of the virtues you need are encompassed in this act. And you=re always doing enough, provided you go to it in a spirit of obedience and humility.

AFor all these reasons, which show us the blessing God gives to those who practice the exercise of holy prayer, whether they have a taste for it or are in a state of aridity there, you and I must now give ourselves to God never to omit it, no matter what may happen. If, at the Community hour for prayer, some business matters unexpectedly arise, find another time for it, and in some way or another make up for that lost time. If you only knew how easy it is to distinguish a person who prays from one who doesn=t, Sisters! It's quite obvious. You see a

Sister who is reserved in her words and actions; is prudent, recollected, affable, cheerful--but in a holy way--you can say, >There's a Sister of prayer.= On the contrary, one who doesn't go to prayer--or rarely--and who is glad when the opportunity presents itself not to go, gives bad example, is not affable with either her Sisters or with the patients and is incorrigible in her habits. It's easy to see that she doesn't make her prayer. That's why you must be extremely careful not to become lax, Sisters, for if today you find one excuse not to go, tomorrow you'll find another, and so on after that; and you'll end by giving it up entirely. Then it will be greatly feared that you may lose everything, for your ministries are difficult. If God doesn't give you strength and grace often, it's impossible to resist. Flesh and blood find no delight in them, and it's chiefly in prayer that God gives you strength.

ASo, Sisters, there you have the first means, which is never to omit your prayer. A second one is to ask God for the grace of being able to make your meditation, and to ask Him constantly for it. It's an alms you=re asking of Him; if you keep at it, it's impossible for Him to refuse you. Call on the Blessed Virgin, your patron saint, your Guardian Angel. Imagine that whole heavenly court is present, and that, if God refuses you, He won't refuse them. Sometimes the Blessed Virgin will make your prayer for you, sometimes your Guardian Angel, sometimes your patron saint; and in this way it will never go without being made, nor will you be without benefit from it.

ATo make it easier for you, it will also be a good idea for you to read one point of the meditation the evening before, and reread it the following morning, even a couple of times. We do that at our house. It would also be well for you to keep handy some pictures of the mysteries on which you meditate. While looking at them, think, >What is that? What does that mean?= And in that way your mind will be opened. A servant of God learned to meditate in this way. Looking at a picture of the Blessed Virgin, she would consider the eyes, and say, >O eyes of the Blessed Virgin, what did you do?= And an interior voice replied, >I was recollected, and mortified myself in things that might have delighted me.= >What else did you do?= >I would see God in His creatures, and pass from there to the admiration of His goodness.= And then she started over, >O eyes of the Blessed Virgin, what else did you do?= >I took great pleasure in looking at my Son; and in looking at Him, I was raised to the love of God.= >What else did you do?= >I took great pleasure in looking at my neighbor, especially the poor.= From all that, this holy soul learned everything she should do in imitation of the Blessed Virgin; for, when she had finished with the eyes, she went on to the mouth, the nose, the ears, the sense of touch. And in this way she learned so well how to control her senses that she attained a high degree of prayer and virtue.

AAnother means--I'm speaking now to those who know how to read--is for each Sister to have her own book. It's a good idea for each of you to have one, or that whoever reads should read sentence by sentence, then pause at the end of the first sentence for as long as necessary, then move on to the second and pause there, then to the third, and so on. Your prayer time will pass very easily. If you don't find anything to retain your attention in the first sentence, go on to the second, or to another. The Queen uses this method. >I didn't know how to pray,= she said. She has someone read to her, then she meditates on what has been read. Many great people are following her example and are making progress in prayer.

AAnother means is mortification, Sisters, which will be an excellent preparation for your prayer. These are two sisters so closely united that one is never found without the other. Mortification goes first and prayer follows, so that, if you want to become Sisters of prayer--as

you must be, dear Sisters--learn to mortify yourselves; mortify the external senses, the passions, the judgment, and your own will; and have no doubt that, if you stay on this road, you'll make great progress in prayer in a short time. God will take care of you; He'll bear in mind the humility of His servants, for mortification springs from humility, and in this way He'll share with you the secrets He has promised to reveal to the lowly and the humble. I thank Him with all my heart for having made us poor and in the number of those who, by their lowly condition, may hope to attain the knowledge of His greatness. I thank Him also for willing that the Company of the Daughters of Charity should be composed of poor, simple women, who may, nevertheless, hope to share His most secret mysteries.

I thank Him for this and entreat Him to be His own thanks for it, and I ask You, my Savior Jesus Christ, to pour forth abundantly on this Company the gift of prayer, so that, by knowing You, it may acquire Your love. Grant it to them, my God, You who, throughout Your life, were a man of prayer, who prayed constantly from the time you were a young child, and who, in the end, prepared Yourself by prayer to face death. Give us this sacred gift so that by it we may be able to defend ourselves against temptation and be faithful to the service You expect of us. I ask this of the Father, through the Son, in whose name, miserable sinner that I am, I pronounce the words of blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

38. - THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

July 28, 1648

The conference on the spirit of the world was begun by M. Thibault[1] on July 28, 1648, and completed by M. Vincent on August 25.

AThe subject of the present conference, Sisters, is the spirit of the world. It's divided into three points. In the first we'll see the reasons why Daughters of Charity should give themselves to God to shun the spirit of the world; in the second, what the spirit of the world is and in what it consists; and in the third, the means each of us should take to shun the spirit of the world.

APlease tell us your thoughts on this, Sister.@

AOne of the reasons we have for shunning the spirit of the world is that Jesus Christ didn't pray for the world. Another reason is that Saint Paul states that, if we love the world, we'll perish with the world. A third reason is that, from all eternity, God planned to save us by ways quite contrary to those of the world, and if we follow the ways of the world, they'll turn us away from those of God.

AOn the second point, the spirit of the world seemed to me to be an ambitious, irreligious spirit, with no other aim than self-gratification. One very efficacious means is the reception of the sacraments, which keeps us close to God and, consequently, detaches us from the spirit of the world. Another means is to reflect that our attire is poor and of a style far removed from that of the world; therefore, we must distance ourselves from the spirit of the world if we don't want to be hypocrites, dressing contrary to our spirit. Poverty in regard to food is another means for avoiding the spirit of the world, and so is work, which, by keeping our mind occupied, will easily divert it from a worldly spirit.@

AThose are good reasons, Sister, and excellent means to combat the spirit of the world; for it would really be ridiculous for women dressed like you, poorly nourished as you are, and carrying out the lowly, abject duties in which you are engaged, to maintain amid all that a spirit filled with the principles, maxims, and opinions of the world.

AAnd you, Sister, would you tell us another means for fighting against the spirit of the

world?@

AFather, I think the practice of the Rules is a good means for ridding ourselves from the spirit of the world.@

AYou=re right, Sister, and, provided you=re faithful to them, nothing can keep a tighter rein on you against the spirit of the world because, by God's grace, they=re drawn up in such a way that they have no part in it. And to help you to be more exact in observing them, it will be well, Sister, for you and all those who feel as you do to read them or have them read from time to time. Reading the Rules incites you to practice them. If a Sister has been lax in them, she's ashamed of this and makes up her mind to be more faithful.

ADo you have any other means to tell us, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that the holy exercise of the presence of God can be very helpful in detaching us from the spirit of the world.@

AAnd you, Sister, have you thought about the topic of this conference? Would you tell us why a Daughter of Charity must give herself to God in a special way to resist the spirit of the world?@

ABecause the spirit of the world is displeasing to God, especially in Communities.@

AAnd do you know any means to do this, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that recalling the points of the conference will help us to resist the spirit of the world.@

AThat's an excellent means, Sister, especially striving to retain the sentiments God gave you during your meditation on this topic. Now, to facilitate for you the means of making this sort of prayer readily, I'm going to say a few words on it. I think that your conferences, like ours, are usually divided into two points: (1) the motives and (2) the means. To enter into the first, we have to consider the benefits to a person who practices the virtue proposed, and, on the contrary, the harm there is in not observing it; as, for instance, in connection with today's subject, to see how fitting it is for a Daughter of Charity, who has given herself to God to serve Him in the lowliest work there is, to distance herself from the spirit of the world and be filled with the spirit of God; and, on the contrary, the harm it would do both her and her neighbor if, having given herself to God in this way of life, she were still filled with the spirit of the world.

ANext, if we recognize that we=re tainted with this wretched spirit and are aware of the harm it does the soul, we'll reflect on the best means to free ourselves of it. If, by the mercy of God, we=re not caught up in it, we'll see what precautions we'll have to take to prevent ourselves from falling into it. In this way, Sisters, you'll be furnished with motives and means on the topics proposed to you.

APlease tell us, Sister, the thoughts God has given you on the subject at hand.@

AI thought, Monsieur, that a powerful motive for detaching ourselves from the spirit of the world is to reflect that God has called us to a vocation that is quite opposed to it. As means, it seems to me that humble obedience, the practice of mental prayer, and interior recollection will keep us far removed from the spirit of the world. But, on this point, Monsieur, a difficulty occurred to me, which is that we don't always make our prayer because it frequently happens that, at the time we should be making it in the morning, we have to deliver the medicines, and in the evening, there are always drugs to be dispensed, with the result that entire days go by without our making it.@

ASister, even though prayer is extremely necessary for a Daughter of Charity, nevertheless, I'll tell you that, since your principal ministry is the service of your neighbor, when there's

question of helping him and reason to fear it may be detrimental to him if you put this off, then you are obliged to leave your prayer. Furthermore, if there were no other time to assist him but the time for Mass, you should omit it--and I don't mean only on a working day, but even on a day of obligation--rather than leave him in danger, for assistance to the neighbor has been established by God himself and practiced by Our Lord Jesus Christ, but the obligation of hearing Mass is only of ecclesiastical institution. I'm glad to have the chance to tell you this, Sisters, so that, although you should be as punctual as possible for all your spiritual exercises, nevertheless, you may be sure that you must leave everything for the service of the poor. Still, Sisters, as far as you can, you must accommodate Martha to Mary, and arrange your duties in such a way that both prayer and work may be reconciled.

ATell us another motive to oblige us to avoid the spirit of the world, Sister.@

AMonsieur, I think that: (1) the Holy Spirit is not found where the spirit of the world is present; (2) modesty is incompatible with the spirit of the world, and (3) if we don't avoid the spirit of the world, we=re in great danger of losing our vocation.@

AI won't conclude this conference, Sisters, because M. Vincent, who was very anxious to hold it himself but was unable, will be glad to finish it. That's why we'll just add a little to what you=ve said. Moreover, it isn't for me, I who have very good reason to fear still being tainted by this spirit, to treat effectively the means of combating it; for, in order to speak well about the spirit of the world, one must be filled with the spirit of God. In addition, I wasn't prepared for this because I wasn't informed of it. Nevertheless, I'll still tell you the thoughts that occurred to me on this topic while you were speaking.

AThe first one, which is very pressing and to which no objection can be raised, is that you are Christians, Sisters, and consequently obliged to wage war against the world by the promises you made to God at Baptism. When you were asked, >Do you renounce the devil, the world, and its pomps?= you replied, >I do renounce them.= And, although you didn't say the words yourselves, but by the mouths of your godfathers and godmothers, you must keep faith with God and carry out the promises made on your behalf. You wouldn't want to renounce the inviolable mark you received in this sacrament, nor the grace and faith conferred on you at that time. So, you must keep the promises you made; otherwise, you would certainly be Christians, for the mark can't be removed, but, by not doing the works, it would be in name only. Please give that a little thought, Sisters. >By a special grace of God, I am a Christian. Many others will be damned because they were not, but they would have been better than I, if God had granted them this favor. Would I want to renounce what I promised God? What a crime that would be, and what punishment would I not deserve!= There's no doubt that, if you take those ideas to heart, you'll preserve the spirit of God and eradicate the spirit of the world.

AYou should know, Sisters, that everyone has his particular spirit. The spirit of a nobleman is different from that of a lawyer, a merchant, a cabinetmaker, or a farm worker. And the spirit of each consists in devoting himself to learning everything he must know for his profession. God has given us the grace of calling us to a vocation totally contrary and opposed to the spirit of the world; and if, instead of striving to know and seek the spirit of God, which is proper to us, we=re satisfied with the spirit of the world, which is opposed to us, we'll be like a statesman who would have only the spirit of an artisan. To succeed in a state of life, one must have its spirit; otherwise, one ruins everything. Put a soldier in a lawyer's office and he'll be useless because that's not his spirit. Put a baker in a tailor's shop and he'll ruin everything because the spirit of a baker is one thing and that of a tailor is another.

AIn the same way, to be a good Daughter of Charity, you must have the spirit of your vocation. When a Daughter of Charity doesn't have the spirit of her vocation, she does no good and doesn't succeed in anything; you see no charity in her, no recollection, no modesty; she gives bad example to those who see her, and you may read on her forehead: >This Sister doesn't have the spirit of her vocation.=

AWhat is your intention, dear Sisters? I ask you this quite frankly, and you should put the same question to yourselves. When you committed yourself to this way of life, was it to live according to the world? If that's what you wanted, you shouldn't have left it. If it was to change your way of life, you must change your spirit and adopt the one proper to the state of life you=ve embraced; otherwise, you'll never succeed. The world, as has been said, has maxims totally contrary to those of God; and to live according to the world is to live as an enemy of God. Holy Scripture is filled with the invectives God utters through His servants against the world and its spirit; and when the Son of God was on earth, He taught us by His example how to resist the spirit of the world. And how did He teach us? By poverty, humility, obedience, penance, hunger, thirst, and finally by His death, which the world procured for Him and to which He was condemned by the world and its maxims.

AThose who have the spirit of God, Sisters, do the works of God. God is holy, and they do very holy works. *Eh bien*! Don't you want to be daughters of God? Yes, no doubt you do; I can tell that from your expression, which is the witness of your heart. You are Daughters of Charity. God is charity, says Saint Paul; therefore, since you are Daughters of Charity, you are daughters of God. To be His true daughters you must do His works. Isn't this what you want? Yes, no doubt you do, and you desire with all your heart to strive to combat the spirit and maxims of the world because, if someone follows the maxims of God, she's a daughter of God. So, too, if someone follows the maxims of the devil, she's a daughter of the devil. And you don't want that; you want to wage war against it with all your might. And to do so properly, you must know, Sisters, what the spirit of the world is.

AAccording to Saint John, the spirit of the world consists in lust of the eyes, concupiscence of the flesh, and pride of life.[2] These three things are the fatal, miserable sources from which flow all the other channels that lead the soul to its infallible loss. For a greater realization of their enormity, Sisters, pause and reflect a little on the spirit of Jesus Christ. He wasn't rich, as we see from what He said to those who wanted to follow Him: >The birds have their nests and the foxes have holes, but I have no stone on which to lay my head.=[3] We know that, as long as He remained with Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, He earned His living by the work of His hands, and from the day He began to preach, He lived on the charity of Mary Magdalen and the other devout women who followed Him, looking after His needs and those of His Apostles. Now, you see from this, Sisters, that, if wealth had been a means necessary to salvation, Our Lord wouldn't have lived in such poverty, and you can conclude that the spirit of the world, which hungers for and covets riches, leads to damnation.

ASisters, if anyone among you should not love poverty, let her consider that of the Son of God; if someone else should love approval, let her glance at the life of Jesus Christ and see how He received it. When praised for His teaching and miracles, He referred all the glory to His Father; but His Father and He were one, and that was to teach us that we mustn't attribute anything to ourselves. The Christians of the primitive Church imitated the spirit of Our Lord so closely that wherever they went they were recognized by their poverty, modesty, words, and works.

AA great means to combat the spirit of the world, Sisters, is to think about those who have lived in the spirit of Jesus Christ. The lives of the saints are full of it; otherwise they=d never have become saints. Don't think that you have to be separated from the world to acquire it. The Apostles preserved it while living among the people, and communicated it to them by their conversation, for conversation is derived from the word *versatio*, which means the pouring out of the thoughts and feelings of one mind into that of another by mutual communication. Consequently, Sisters, to preserve the spirit of Jesus Christ, we must avoid worldly persons, who try to destroy it by their wiles, and never speak among yourselves of anything but what will lead you to love all that Our Lord has recommended.

AThe last means, which you should use the most frequently, is to ask it often and confidently of God; for He'll never refuse you, Sisters. He has promised it to those who want to follow Him. You may sometimes remind Him of His promises, if you feel a great desire for this. *Eh quoi*! My God, I'm totally filled with the spirit of the world, and You have promised special assistance to those who would follow You; would You refuse it to me to help me rid myself of an enemy who fights so boldly against Your glory, and who uses so many tricks to thwart my salvation? My God, I hope You'll give me all the assistance needed to bring him down. I desire this and ask You for it with all my heart, which I implore You to fill with the holy maxims You taught Your Apostles and those who, filled with Your true spirit, have happily overcome the spirit of the world. With you, Sisters, I pray earnestly for this spirit, both for you and for me, I who need it so much. In the hope of obtaining it, I will now pronounce the blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

39. - THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

August 25, 1648

AThis topic has already been dealt with, Sisters; consequently, since I have very little time, I'll just touch on each point. The first point is why Daughters of Charity should give themselves to God to avoid the spirit of the world. Sister, please tell me the reasons that may prompt a Daughter of Charity to rid herself of the spirit of the world.@

ABecause we cannot serve two masters.@

AThat's an excellent thought, Sisters, for our Sister means that, as long as a Daughter of Charity has her mind filled with the superficial things of the world, she'll be inclined to follow it. It's an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ that we cannot serve two masters; so much so that anyone filled with the spirit of the world can be sure that she can't have that of God.

AAnd you, Sister, give us one reason--just one--why Daughters of Charity must work to rid themselves of the spirit of the world.@

ABecause the spirit of the world prevents us from devoting ourselves to God.@

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think you must rid yourself of the spirit of the world?@

ABecause it's absolutely contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ, who said himself that He was not of the world.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

ABecause those who are of the world are abandoned by Jesus Christ, who said that He didn't pray for the world.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

ABecause it has never been known that persons who succeeded in serving God in Christian perfection had a share in the spirit of the world.@

AAnd you, Sister?@

ABecause Our Lord, in the person of His Apostles, taught all those who would follow Him that they mustn't be part of it, saying to them, >You don't belong to the world; if you did, the world would love you; but you don=t, and that's why the world hates you.=[1] @

AAnd you, Sister?@

ABecause the world may be very prejudicial to our salvation, seeing that Jesus Christ, who is a lover of peace, commanded His servants to dissociate themselves from the world.@

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts on this?@

AFather, the subject of the conference is flight from the world. The first motive we have for avoiding the spirit of the world is that it's totally contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ; the second is that the spirit of the world is filled with darkness and confusion, which prevents us from knowing ourselves and what's good; the third is that the spirit of the world is nothing but vanity and falsehood, and aims constantly to destroy the spirit of Jesus Christ.@

ABy the grace of God, those are sufficient reasons to direct our minds to rid themselves of the spirit of the world. That's why, since this matter has already been treated, I'm not going to spend much time on it. Let's now see in what the spirit of the world consists. In what do you think the spirit of the world consists, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that this spirit is an abyss of all sorts of wickedness, since the world is simply an assembly of the wicked; therefore, we can easily have the spirit of the world, even though we may be far removed from it physically, if our mind is occupied with thoughts of what's going on in the world and wants to be part of it.@

AAnd you, Sister, will you tell us in what the spirit of the world consists?@

AI think, Father, that to imagine in what the spirit of the world consists, we must think about the spirit of Jesus Christ and all His maxims, and picture to ourselves the opposite of everything He teaches. For instance, Our Lord urges us to sell what we have, take up our cross, and follow Him; and the world looks on that as folly. Our Lord invites us to embrace contempt, humiliations, and sufferings; and the world rejects all that in order to seek honor and pleasure.@

AAnd you, Mademoiselle?@

AIt seems to me that the spirit of the world is to thwart all those who do good, to love riches and honor, to avoid all that's distasteful to nature, to give it whatever it wants by continually acquiescing in all the suggestions of the senses, and to reject any form of constraint, in such a way that the spirit of the world seems to induce those who follow it to form a god of their own, according to their sensual, earthly idea, forgetting the honor and obedience they owe to the one true God. I have to mention this truth with great shame, having learned it from my own weakness and from following my sensuous desires, which I haven't combated with the courage I should have had.@

ANow, Sister, what means do you think should be adopted in order to reject the spirit of the world?@

AI think we have to ask God for it every day.@

Another Sister said, AConsider in all our actions the spirit with which the Son of God performed His, so as to try to do ours in the same spirit.@

AIt seems to me,@ said another Sister, Athat a good means is never to talk about what people of the world do, for fear that our mind may tend to become attached to it, which could cause our ruin.@

AI think it's good to be very recollected,@ added another Sister, Aand not to linger with lay

persons any longer than the time needed to transact our business with them.@

AOne means of shunning the spirit of the world,@ replied another Sister, Ais to ask God humbly and constantly to help us realize what's evil in it in order to have a great hatred of it.@

Another Sister said, AThank Our Lord every day for having placed us on the path that will distance us from it, and ask Him for the strength and help to rid ourselves of it once and for all.@

ATo be strongly attached to the spirit of Jesus Christ,@ added another Sister, Aand to try to act in such a way that we do nothing that is not in conformity with it.@

Several other Sisters spoke on all the points and said much the same as has already been included here. After that, Most Honored Father began as follows: AWell now, blessed be God, blessed be God, and may He be praised forever that, in His infinite goodness and mercy, He has deigned to make known to us that those who would serve Him in spirit and truth must be far removed from the spirit of the world! But when we speak of the spirit of the world, dear Sisters, you must know both what the world is and what its spirit is. The world, properly speaking, may be understood to be this great machine that makes up the universe, and its spirit, the spirit that moves and guides it. The world may also be understood to mean all people taken together, and its spirit would be that of all people in general. Again, the world may be taken to mean worldly people, persons addicted to pleasure, vanity, and greed, and the spirit that animates such persons is a spirit of perdition and damnation that revolts against God and leads the soul to total ruin. For that reason the Son of God didn't pray for such people. He who came on earth only to save us, who gave His blood and His life for our redemption, found there some persons driven by such an evil spirit that they obliged Him not to pray for them.

AWhat a powerful reason, Sisters. >*Quoi*! I, a Daughter of Charity, who had the intention of giving myself to God to serve Him and to work out my salvation, shall I find myself in such a state that the Son of God will abandon me and not pray for me! And to whom shall I turn? Who will protect me if I'm deserted by my Lord Jesus Christ? How shall I dare to address the Eternal Father, if His Son abandons me?= And yet, Sisters, this will be only too true if you have any part in the spirit of the world and make no effort to free yourself.

A >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >how can a Daughter of Charity have anything to do with the spirit of the world?= Oh, I'll tell you how! In the first place, the world--or the spirit of the world--is nothing other than lust of the eyes, by which is meant a love of riches and a desire to have what we see others possess; concupiscence of the flesh, which is a love of pleasure, whether of the sense of hearing, sight, taste, or touch--in a word, of anything that satisfies these senses--and pride of life, which is an attachment to honor and esteem, wanting people to have a high opinion of us, to speak well of us, and to think we=re doing a good job in a certain hospital, parish, country district, or wherever we may be ministering.

A >But, Monsieur, is it possible that a poorly dressed Sister, with her work so mapped out for her that often she doesn't have time to finish it, could be so involved with what you=ve just said?= I reply, Sisters, that, if we=re not on our guard, the world tries to have a hand in everything. That's what led Saint Paul to say: >Let us do good, for fear that the world may seduce us.=[2]

AA Daughter of Charity, who must imitate the holy poverty of Jesus Christ, may have an immoderate, compelling desire to lack nothing for her comfort: to be well housed in well-furnished rooms and to have a nice bed; that's an attachment to the good life, which proceeds from the spirit of the world and from lust of the eyes.

AThen there's an attachment to honor. This Sister won't care whether she's well accommodated, but will love prestige, be pleased to be on good terms with the Ladies and with her Sisters who are near the Superioress, and to be considered attentive in her ministry, kind with the sick, and exact in her Rules. That's pride of life.

AA Sister who is displeased because she has cheap clothing or because her collar isn't nicely laundered or good enough, will be upset by this. She won't go willingly where she has work to do, will want shoes that are well made, and will be annoyed if they low-heeled or are mended badly. All that is the spirit of the world, Sisters! Please be careful.

AA Daughter of Charity has the spirit of the world if she likes to use refined language, to be singled out as someone who speaks well, and who, if there's a new, fashionable word, knows it and waits for the best opportunity to use it!

AWhen I point out to you all those desires proceeding from the spirit of the world, don't think it's my intention, dear Sisters, to have you fall into the opposite faults and that a properly furnished room should give way to untidiness; or love of honor to a way of acting that might give bad example to your neighbor; or instead of a neat, clean collar, a soiled, untidy one; or that you should use coarse, vulgar words instead of those affected ones that the French language adopts from time to time and which you don't need to make yourselves understood, because most often they=re meaningless. No, you must always avoid extremes. You can have a tidy room; that's always a good thing, but don't be concerned if it's not so beautiful or the furniture is shabby. You have to do your best to see that your poor persons never need anything, but don't do it from a desire to have the Pastor and the Ladies hear of it and praise you. You must be exact about your Rules, but with the thought that you=re pleasing God by following them and not in order to be held in higher regard by your Superioress and your Sisters. You must keep your linen and simple clothing clean, but if your collar is soiled or if Providence doesn't permit that it be well laundered, think nothing of it and act as if it were.

AA further sign of the spirit of the world, dear Sisters, is to keep anything for your private use, to put something by, to set aside some money for a time of need, to have certain comforts that you don't have in the house or which wouldn't be allowed if you requested them. How abominable and diabolical is the spirit of the world! By the grace of God, I don't know of any Sisters who might want to do this. But, if there were any, *mon Dieu*! how contrary that would be to the spirit and holy maxims of the Son of God!

AIt's also the spirit of the world to find it hard to be with our poor relations, to want people to think we=ve come from a better, more comfortable home than we actually have, and to be ashamed to say from whom we=re descended. It's likewise the spirit of the world to want to be well housed and to have a well-aired and comfortable room in a fine house.

AAgain, it's the spirit of the world to be unwilling to have certain Sisters as companions, not to adapt ourselves to their moods, or to consider them too unrefined. Alas! Sisters, we don't know what we want; we often have treasures without being aware of it. But all that is discovered afterward, when those Sisters have died and each of you comes to tell us what you know about them. *Mon Dieu*! Don't you remember, Sisters, the beautiful conference we had on Sister Louise,[3] where we heard such wonderful things about her--things we had never dreamed of? I know some of you who, by God's grace, are far from having any of the signs we=ve given of this worldly spirit, and I=d like to hope from God's mercy that if this doesn't apply to all, it does to most of you. I'm not very sure of this because I don't see you often on account of my other business affairs; it would certainly be one of my greatest and most tangible consolations. At any

rate, I do know that, by God's grace, there are some who count nothing dearer than to find occasions to mortify themselves. I know there are some who work hard and courageously at ridding themselves of the natural aversions they may have for other personalities contrary to theirs. I know there are some who never complain of their companions, whoever they may be. I'm also aware, however, that several love their own ease, desire to be well housed and accommodated, and to have as a companion some Sister with an attractive personality. I=d like to hope that, with God's help, they'll be cured of all that.

AIt's also the mark of a worldly spirit to be preoccupied with eating, wanting the food to be good and well seasoned and that the meat not always be of the poorest grade. To complain that the meals haven't been prepared according to our liking is also a sign of a worldly spirit. >This bread isn't good; it's impossible to eat it. This meat is so skimpy; it would make you die of hunger.= That's the spirit of the world, Sisters, the spirit of self-indulgence!

ATo complain about your health is likewise a sign of the spirit of the world. >We don't take care of the sick Sisters; they=re left without any consolation; they don't have any delicacies; they=re not given remedies.= If such thoughts occur, Sisters, it's the spirit of the world that's suggesting them because, by the grace of God, I know of no Community that's so well looked after as yours, and that, through the wise administration of the Sister in charge of you, the Motherhouse is able to provide for the needs of both the sick and the healthy. If there's nothing superfluous, you should praise God because to squander the good things He gives us, when there's no need or usefulness in doing so, is to misuse them.

AI'm sure that while I'm telling you this, Sisters, some of you are saying to yourselves, >He's describing me; I recognize myself; I'm full of the spirit of the world.= On this point, I=d like to remark that there's a big difference between being tempted and yielding to it. Now, there's no one who doesn't feel the natural repugnance we all have toward inconveniences. But if the Sister who feels it controls herself and doesn't let it gain the upper hand, far from this repugnance being imputed to her as a sin, she uses it, on the contrary, as an opportunity for merit. These feelings may certainly come to you, Sisters, but if you resist them, don't dwell on them, and don't complain about them to others, they=re nothing but tests of your fidelity to God.

AIt's also the spirit of the world to want to be Sister Servant and to be in charge of the others, and to think that you=re more capable of this office and will fulfill it better than another Sister. That's the spirit of the world, and may God in His infinite mercy be pleased to preserve you from it!

ASo much for the second point; that brings us now to the remedies. >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >how can I be on my guard at every moment and on every occasion to combat this spirit with which I'm filled? Frankly, I=d just as soon give it all up, and let matters take their course! I'll never see the end of it. It's a problem with too many ramifications.= Don't act like that, Sister! There's a remedy for everything. Doctors cure indispositions by their opposites. They strive to find the cause of an illness, and if it comes from heat they cure it by cooling medications, and if from cold, by warmer remedies.

AFor instance, a Sister loves nice things and is happy always to keep something in her own possession to be used, so she says, in time of need. This must be cured by some practice of poverty, being content when we lack something, not being in too great a hurry to have what we need for our convenience. It's all right to request things, but if we feel that we=re too inclined to ask for what we can do without, we have to mortify ourselves in that. So, little by little, today in one thing, tomorrow in another, with God's help and the trouble we take, we'll acquire the habit

of the virtue contrary to this vice.

AWe=ve said that people have a certain natural inclination for honor. Perhaps we=re not concerned about it nor seek after it, but we=re glad to be respected because sometimes that gives us the opportunity to do more good and to procure some relief for the neighbor that he wouldn't have otherwise. The remedy for this, Sisters, is to love the little humiliations Providence sends you or those encountered in the places where you are ministering. Love that, my dear Sisters, and consider it as certain that there's no true glory except in the practice of true virtue, which comes to us from God. Consequently, it's to Him we must attribute all the glory that reverts to us from it. Let's always mistrust our own strength and believe that if God didn't preserve us constantly, we=d have some irreparable falls.

AAs for the other sign of the spirit of the world, which is pleasure, you must resist it by mortification of the senses. >But, Monsieur, I feel a constant penchant to look at things that satisfy me, or to listen to what pleases me. How can I conquer this tendency, which is natural to me and still deeply entrenched in me through force of habit?= Take great care to rid yourself of that enemy, dear Sisters. Let no opportunity pass of attacking it. I feel inclined to look at something that pleases me; then I won't look. I'm happy to talk with a certain person I like, who speaks so well, gives such excellent reasons, and says such lovely things; but that's unnecessary for my growth, for it isn't conducive to it, and I'm seeking only to gratify myself in it; I have to--and I want to--mortify myself in this. I take pleasure in the sense of taste, of touch. Oh, Sisters! slay those monsters by abstaining from even legitimate contacts. Along with the sense of taste, mortify the sense of touch by using rough linen and coarse cloth, and don't give it any satisfaction.

AI=ve gone on inadvertently much longer than I thought, dear Sisters. I think those are some of the disorders that the spirit of the world can create among you. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into this world to destroy it, to make known personally to each one of you all the circumstances in which you'll need to fight it; to fill you with His own Divine Spirit, which is a deep spirit of charity, humility, and poverty, as opposed to the spirit of pride, covetousness, and avarice; and to give it to the Company in general and to each one in particular!

AIn this confidence, I will now pronounce the words of blessing, which bring with them the Spirit of God. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

40. - LOVE OF OUR VOCATION

December 25, 1648

Most Honored Father read the note and began in nearly the following words: ASisters, the subject of this conference is the love we must have for our vocation. It's divided into three points. The first concerns the reasons for loving our vocation more and more; the second deals with what makes us grow cold or hinders us from loving it, and the third is the means we can use to love it ever more and more. This is a very important subject, Sisters, because any progress we make in virtue depends on the love we have for our vocation.

APlease tell us your thoughts on the first point, Sister, and the reasons that occurred to you.@

AAs a first reason, I thought that it's impossible for us to remain always in the same state. If, therefore, we don't advance in the love of our vocation, we grow cold and fall back. Another reason is that, because of the difficulties we encounter daily in it, we can't persevere very long in our vocation if we=re not affirmed in this love, and if it doesn't outweigh the difficulty. A third reason is that, without this same love, we can't resist the temptations with which the world, the flesh, and the devil continually assault us.@

A further reason, offered by another Sister, is that our vocation brings down God's blessing on all the rest of our actions and on our entire life.

Another reason is drawn from the graces God has given each one of us in particular--graces that can't be appreciated enough when we think of the dangers from which He has rescued some, the hardships from which He has delivered others, and the places from which He called us to bring us to this place to work out our salvation.

Another Sister put forward that our vocation is in keeping with the life the Son of God led on earth and the holy counsels He left us.

Another reason: Although our vocation is lowly and contemptible in people's eyes, it is, nevertheless, very lofty in the sight of God because its sole aim is to please Him in all we undertake.

Another reason: God himself has given us an attachment to our vocation, and we must endure all sorts of losses rather than consent to anything whatsoever that might lessen the love we must have for it.

Another reason: The care God takes of our Company should give us the confidence that, as long as we have the happiness of belonging to it, He won't allow us to perish.

Another reason is that, by the grace of God, we can note some improvement in our lives and a change in our behavior, and so far we haven't seen any of our Sisters--although virtuous before entering the Company--die without having made great progress in perfection.

Mademoiselle, our Most Honored Superioress, commented that we must love our vocation because it's a mission given to us by God.

Another reason: Its whole purpose is the practice of spiritual and corporal charity, which should always maintain us in a most pure manner in God, who binds us to His holy love.

Another reason: If we don't love our vocation, it's to be feared that God may allow us to lose it altogether; should that happen, we'll be in great danger in regard to our salvation, which often depends on our vocation.

Another reason: If we don't love our vocation, we won't do anything that merits for us the love of God, nor anything that can please Him; we'll often give scandal and bad example to our neighbor, and we ourselves will never be content--and may God not abandon us entirely and leave us in a state of hardness of heart.

On the second point, namely, what can distance us from the love we must have for our vocation, the Sister who had given the first reasons on the first point noted, AWhat distances us from the love of our vocation is, first of all, yielding to the temptations I just mentioned. The first, which concerns the world, is absolutely dangerous and capable of causing us to lose all the love we could have; it occurs when we listen to the talk of the Sisters who might have no love for their vocation.

AThe second temptation comes from the flesh, which complains constantly and desires to have all its comforts; in our vocation we have to avoid this. The devil, by means of the temptations he creates for us, incites us constantly to thoughts of pride and vainglory; and when they enter the mind of a Daughter of Charity, they take away all love for her vocation, which calls for a love of humility and lowliness.

AAnother obstacle to love of our vocation is the spirit of the world, the desire to know what's going on there, and the fear of not being esteemed by it. It may also happen that we stop loving our vocation because we fail to appreciate all that is proper to it, causing us to become negligent, then discouraged, and finally to fall into such a state that we=re in grave danger of losing it, if

God doesn't assist us by a very special grace.

AAnother hindrance is not to be attached strongly enough to the belief that this is where God wants us, and where we should live and die. As a result, we set our sights on some other benefit--although often an imaginary one--and are inclined to listen to the first proposals coming to us from elsewhere; thus it happens that we become troubled by the slightest conflict contrary to our inclination.@

Another hindrance, brought forward by Mademoiselle, is the failure to appreciate our vocation and not consider it a very special grace of God.

Yet another is not to be on the alert against the first feelings of weariness we may experience, and this applies both to newcomers and to older Sisters, who, after rising from their original fall, have recovered their first fervor, by the grace of God. Another is voluntary neglect of the smallest points of the Rules. The greatest hindrance of all is not to tell our Superiors of the first feelings of distaste for our vocation and what has caused them.

On the third point, regarding the means that may help to increase in us the love of our vocation, the following was said:

AThe first means is to ask God for it every day and to declare often that we don't want to yield to temptations, from whatever source they come. Another means is to reflect that Our Lord says that He regards as done to himself whatever we do to the least of His brothers and sisters, and to remember that on Judgment Day God will reward or punish us only for the works of mercy we=ve either done or omitted. This will suffice to give us a love for our vocation. Another means is to love persons who are poor as members of Jesus Christ, as He recommends us to do. Another is to throw ourselves at the foot of a crucifix when we begin to experience some temptation against our vocation, and to ask God earnestly for holy perseverance through the merits of His Son. Another means is to mistrust ourselves, which will cause us to turn often to God and to ask Him for holy perseverance.

Another is to make use of the reasons already specified, which prompt us to love our vocation and to avoid what God has shown us to be contrary or harmful to this love. Another means, given by Mademoiselle, is to ask it earnestly of God. Another is to ask our Guardian Angel to obtain it for us and to help us by his wise counsel and holy guidance to do or not to do what is mentioned above to master ourselves in order to overcome our passions and mortify our senses.

After listening with the greatest charity and patience to the Sisters, Most Honored Father began to speak as follows: AI thank God for all I=ve just heard, Sisters: the motives inducing you to love your holy vocation more and more, the hindrances that may arise and cause this love to grow cold, and the means that can help us to increase it more and more. To all these reasons, which are amply sufficient, I'll add one, Sisters: the holiness of your vocation; for it hasn't been instituted by human persons but is of divine institution. Saint Augustine gives us a sign by which we may know if a good work comes from God: good works whose authors can't be found, says this great Doctor, most assuredly come from God. Now, no one can doubt that this work is good in itself, for it is such that I see nothing greater in the entire Church of God; I see nothing more lofty for Sisters. To be continually engaged in the service of your neighbor, *O Dieu*! what a work! And is there anything more noble than to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls, which you strive to do while administering remedies to them?

AThere can be no doubt whatever that it was God who established you. It wasn't Mlle Le Gras; she didn't think of it. As for me, alas! it never occurred to me. The first person to carry out these functions was a good country woman. She used to herd cows, and had taught herself to

read while tending them, questioning passersby who seemed to know how to read. Then she studied on her own what they showed her, and so, by the grace of God, she taught herself.

AOnce she had learned, she felt urged to teach others and came to see me in . . .[1] where I was giving a mission at the time. >Monsieur,= she said to me, >I=ve taught myself to read, in a certain sense. I=ve had a strong desire to teach other country girls who don't know how. Would that be a good thing?= >Certainly, certainly, my daughter,= I said to her, >I advise you to go ahead.= So she went to live in Villepreux, where she taught for a time.

AThe Ladies at Saint-Sauveur had a Confraternity of Charity in their parish; they were serving the sick themselves, carrying the soup pots, medicine, and everything else. Since most of them were of the upper class, were married, and had families, they were often inconvenienced by carrying this soup pot, became disheartened, and talked of finding some servants who would do it for them. When this good young woman heard of the project, she wanted to be part of it and was accepted by the Ladies. The Ladies in other parishes wanted to do the same and asked me if there was any way I could give them some of these women. Mlle Le Gras, to whom God had given the zeal she had all her life for His glory, was asked to take charge of them, to form them in holiness and in the manner of serving poor persons. So, we got a house for them.

AAnd that's how the Company began, with no one planning it, for the good country woman who started it had no thought of it; so you see, Sisters, it's God himself who has brought you together in a very mysterious, excellent way, and not a single person has ever found fault with it. I'm still looking for someone to say, >This isn't a good work.= Who then can doubt that God is the author of your Company? Saint Paul says that every good thing comes from God; and Saint Augustine states that every good work that has no author--that is, that no one can be found who planned it or first brought it into being--comes infallibly from God. Who will assure me that yours has any other author than God himself? You weren't instituted by Saint Francis, Sisters, nor by Saint Dominic, nor by Saint Benedict, nor by Saint Bernard, nor by one of the other great patriarchs, but by God himself.

A >Am I to be a member of a Company instituted by God himself and not love it? If that isn't sufficiently powerful, then what motive do I need to make me love it? = It certainly will be powerful enough if you weigh it well, Sisters. When we find ourselves weary of life, lack ardor, and are confronted with the other annoying encounters in which God tests the fidelity of His servants, both men and women, we can reflect, >*Quoi*! I'm becoming less zealous, but I know I'm in a vocation that God himself established! Can I have any doubt?=

AI'm well aware, dear Sisters, that some among you, by the grace of God, love their vocation so strongly that they=d prefer to be crucified, torn apart, and hacked into a thousand pieces rather than tolerate anything contrary to it--and there are a good number of you, by the mercy of God. This hasn't been given to all, however, and there may be others to whom their vocation isn't so pleasing, who find its practices more painful, who are less submissive, and to whom obedience seems like a yoke that's heavy and difficult to bear. Those Sisters are subject to frequent upsets, and they upset others. Not, by the grace of God, that I know of any, but there may be some and, when that happens, dear Sisters, reflect a little, >What do I have to complain about? Am I not in a Company that God himself has formed and fashioned by His all-powerful hand? And would I be so unfaithful as not to love it?=

AAnd what could you love, Sisters, if you don't love your vocation, when considered in that light? Are you going to love your parents, from whom God has taken you to place you in His holy service? Are you to love your friends, your attachments, your own satisfaction, and

yourselves? No, Sisters, there's nothing so lovable for you as your vocation, for the reason I=ve just given you, namely, that God himself is its author.

AThe second reason mentioned is that God has taken you from your homes to bring you here by a very special grace--a grace so great, so outstanding, that we could never appreciate it enough. David, filled with gratitude and praise, exclaimed, >God has taken me from my father's house to call me to him.= [2] It must indeed be the goodness of God that attracted you, Sisters, for, I ask you, did the Sisters seek you out? Perhaps you saw them, but did they urge you to join them? Not at all. Did people pressure you about this? Just as little. Perhaps they told you that the Company existed, but God had to touch your hearts and give you the desire and courage to come here. What could have made you leave your home, your father and mother, your possessions--in the case of some--and your dreams of the joys and pleasures of this world? It took a divine power, Sisters. Human beings couldn't have done it; nature is loath to do it, and everything is opposed to it. It must, therefore, be God. So, Sisters, this is a very powerful motive, and keeping it in mind can and should overcome all the obstacles that try to stand in the way of the love of your vocation. >*Quoi*! I'm becoming less zealous, no longer have my first fervor, and am letting myself be demoralized! I'm forgetting that it's God who called me, and the great joy and consolation that gave me at the time!= Be very much on your guard against this, dear Sisters, and if you feel your first fervor growing cold, try to revive it by recalling these reasons.

AHere now is the third reason or motive to induce us to advance in the love of our vocation, and that is its excellence and grandeur, for it's such, dear Sisters, that I know of none greater in the entire Church. You declare that you=re devoting your life to the service of your neighbor for the love of God. Is there any act of love to surpass that? No, for it's an acknowledged fact that the greatest proof of love is to give one's life for what is loved. You are giving your entire life to the practice of charity and, therefore, you=re giving it for God. It follows that there's no ministry on earth concerned with the service of God that's greater than yours. I make exception of the nuns at the Hôtel-Dieu, who profess to do the same, and who work day and night for the service of God in the person of the poor. So, Sisters, I don't see anyone to equal you, except those who do what you do. And then you=re going to love something contrary to your vocation that might tarnish its beauty? Far from that, Sisters, I hope you who already have this love will continue to grow in it, and that those who might not experience it will strive to acquire it; for, take my word, Sisters, our whole perfection depends on this. If a religious--male or female--a Carthusian, a Capuchin, a Missionary, doesn't have the spirit and love of their vocation, everything they do is worthless and they spoil everything because the spirit of a Carthusian, a Capuchin, and a Missionary is different for each, and the spirit of a nun is different from that of a Daughter of Charity. To do things right, each one must work so diligently at acquiring his or her spirit that it's impossible to confuse another with it; for however good and holy in itself a spirit may be in those who profess it, it would be harmful and contrary to the man or woman who should have a different one.

AI know that a good number of you have this spirit so well formed in you that nothing on earth could cause you to make the slightest change in it. Furthermore, this grace was so strong in most of our Sisters who have died that, had they lived in the days of Saint Jerome, he would have written their lives in such a favorable light that we=d be in admiration of them. What produced all that in them? It was the love of their vocation, whose spirit was so steadfast in them that they were faithful even to the smallest practices.

ASo those are the three motives which, along with those you mentioned, Sisters, can inspire

you to love your vocation: God is your founder; He himself has called you; and your vocation is the greatest in the Church of God, for you are martyrs; whoever gives his or her life for God is regarded as a martyr, and it's certain that your lives are shortened by your labors; consequently, you are martyrs.

ALet's see now what can draw us away from that. You=ve said some beautiful things, and I'll add that, first of all, it must be taken for granted that every mortal sin separates us from God and deprives us consequently of the love of our vocation. First, you have the pride that inclines you to want to have a high position, to be esteemed, to keep people from thinking we=re of little account. Now I ask you, how could a person puffed up with presumption remain among the poor Daughters of Charity? She'll see herself disdained, set aside, with no claims to honor or to the hope of ever having any among persons of the world; and there are no posts of honor in our houses. >Let him among you who wishes to be the greatest,= Our Lord said to His disciples, >be the least.=[3] Consequently, this accursed sin, which caused the angels to fall from heaven, will prevent Sisters prone to ambition from remaining any length of time in the Company.

AYou also have avarice, which is opposed to holy poverty. If a Daughter of Charity were infected with this vice, then good-bye to her vocation; there's no need to say any more about it; it's all over. The desire to have something for yourself in case of need, or to keep something or other in reserve, Sisters, is to mistrust God's Providence and care. As soon as avarice has its clutches on a soul, good-bye to all virtue! Judas, who had received the grace of being called to be an Apostle and the gift of working miracles, and who, like the other Apostles, was destined for great sanctity, became a demon through avarice. See what this accursed sin really is, that it had the power to change an Apostle into a devil! So you can imagine what will happen if it were once to enter the soul of a Daughter of Charity.

AThe third means that causes us to lose the love of our vocation is--I don't want to say impurity, oh no, never! by the grace of God has that even been mentioned--simply a certain unrestrained liberty. A Sister is quite pleased to meet men; she isn't disturbed in the least by listening to them; she replies to them and keeps up the conversation, even with confessors outside of the confessional; she passes the time speaking of matters that are neither urgent nor necessary, but simply for the sake of making conversation. Watch out for that, Sisters. I repeat, even with confessors, you see. Not, by the mercy of God, that I know of anyone who does this, no; but since these are things that could happen and would be very prejudicial, it's well to be on the alert against them.

AIt's also very harmful to toy with bad thoughts and not to mention them to your confessor or Superioress; and if you=re not careful, you'll be in grave danger of losing your vocation.

AAnother thing that's also damaging to the love of your vocation is self-indulgence in eating and drinking, dear Sisters: wanting to eat choice food, or to delight in having something different from the rest of the Community. This sin leads to I don't know how many others. I don't mean that you shouldn't be fed properly; no, you have to live and, in order to do so, you have to have good, wholesome food, but no superfluities and no looking for something special.

AEnvy also draws us away from our vocation. This sin is a very dangerous plague. To envy is to be displeased that another Sister does better than we do, that the Ladies take notice of her, that the poor are contented with her, and even that she's faithful to her Rule and puts us to shame by her example, if we ourselves aren't exact to it.

AOur perseverance, dear Sisters, has also to do battle with another sin, which I don't say is mortal, except in certain circumstances, but which stems from mortal sin and in a lesser degree

is a venial sin, and that is anger. A Sister may be so bad-tempered that everything offends her. If she's accused of something, she'll dispute it; if someone doesn't answer her quickly enough--perhaps because the person didn't hear her--she'll get angry; if someone enlightens her on her doubt, that will displease her; if she's left to her own devices, she'll regard that as a reason for being discontented. This vice is very dangerous, Sisters, and I ask you to watch out for it, especially since it sometimes becomes a habit--a very bad habit for anyone, but particularly for a servant of God, a Daughter of Charity who should always be amiable and gentle. It's quite certain that the Sister who remains subject to it won't stay in the Company, for she'll always find something in it to vex her, and this vexation will some day reach the point where she'll abandon everything.

AAnother great obstacle is laziness, love of one's own body, which causes so much harm. Laziness sometimes generates misunderstandings among the Sisters, because the Sister tainted by it will spare herself as much as possible, never lending a hand to the heavy work, being content to go out only in fine weather, often leaving everything to the last minute, then hurrying her companion in such a way that the latter can't stand it any longer and will be forced to say so, which will then put her in a bad mood. She'll refuse to get up in the morning, especially in cold weather. When she hears the clock strike, she curls up for another quarter of an hour, then for half an hour and, in the end, stays in bed until six o=clock. She'll be pleased to sit close to the fire or, at any rate, not to move very far away from it. *Mon Dieu*! Sisters, what evils stem from that source! Rest assured that a Sister so contaminated by this won't be concerned with loving her vocation.

ASo there you have sins of every kind that contribute to lessening and destroying in us the love of our vocation, Sisters. In addition, there are the complaints of a companion who is dissatisfied or is little devoted to her vocation. Be very much on your guard against this, Sisters, for it's one of the greatest hindrances to love of your vocation; it's one of the most dangerous plagues that can infect Communities, and all the more to be feared the less careful you are about it.

AA Sister discontented with her vocation is easily annoyed at the slightest disagreeable experience. If the Superioress or the Sister Servant charitably calls her attention to some fault she's committed, all is lost; she's up in arms. What doesn't she say? Now, won't a poor Sister--either a newcomer or perhaps an older one who's a little gullible and impressionable, and who gives a hearing to everything that the other, bad-tempered one tries to report to her--be in great danger, if she's not aided by a special grace?

AWell now, dear Sisters, that's enough for today. I'm sorry to have kept you so long--you poor Sisters who had so much trouble coming and will have just as much going home. *Mon Dieu*! how many angels are now busy counting your footsteps! Those you=ve taken to come here have already been marked off; so, too, will those you will still take; for, says one of the saints, >All the steps taken by the servants of Jesus Christ for His love are counted.=

AI'll conclude briefly. Please God, we'll deal with this topic on another occasion when we have more time, and I think it will be helpful to do it more often than we=ve done until now. That's why I'm going to give you succinctly only two or three means today. The first will be holy humility, the virtue opposed to pride, which, as we=ve already noted, leads to the loss of vocation for most Sisters. . . .@[4]

41. - THE LOVE OF GOD

September 19, 1649

ASisters, the subject of the present conference is the love of God, which is found in today's Gospel, where Our Lord, when asked by a Doctor of the Law which was the greatest of all the commandments, replied, >You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, etc.=[1] Our Lord allowed himself to be asked this to have the opportunity to give us the instruction included in today's Gospel. In line with that, Mlle Le Gras judged it advisable for us to study this topic, which is divided into three points. In the first point we'll see the reasons why the Daughters of Charity are obliged--like all Christians, but in a more particular manner--to love God with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their understanding, etc. In the second point, we'll see the signs by which we can know if we love God. The third point will be on the means of acquiring and increasing love in us; for it's not enough to have it, but it must continue to grow. Well now, blessed be God, blessed be God forever!

ASister, tell me the reasons why a Daughter of Charity is obliged to love God with all her heart.@

ABecause He's infinitely good.@

ARight, Sister. That's a fine answer. You see, Sisters, our Sister says that we must love God because He's infinitely good, and that's a very pressing motive; for, since He's infinitely good, He must be infinitely loved.

ABut why must a Daughter of Charity love God more than anyone else?@

AAs a Daughter of Charity, I feel infinitely obliged to love Him, Monsieur, when I think that His Goodness has withdrawn me from the corrupt mass of the world to place me in such a holy place, where all the works that are done are holy. I'm ashamed to have benefited so little from this until now. I asked Our Lord for the grace to be more attentive to it and have taken the resolution to work harder at it.@

ADo you see, Sisters, the second motive for loving God given by our Sister? The first is that God is infinitely good; that's a general motive common to every person, each of whom feels personally the effects of God's goodness. But one of the signs of this that she has seen in herself is that God has taken her out of the corrupt mass of the world and chosen her from among so many others He has left there, to bring her to such a holy place. The result is that the motive of her love, as a Daughter of Charity, is the thought of how deeply obliged she is to God for the benefit He has conferred on her in calling her into the Company; in other words, for her vocation.

AAnd how can a Daughter of Charity know if she really loves God, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that she can know it if she feels a great desire to please Him.@

AThat's truly a great sign, Sister; for, if she has a strong desire to please Him, she'll be careful not to offend Him and, on the contrary, will take care to do everything she knows is in conformity with His Will or desire. A person who wishes to please another tries to find out his feelings about things, to conform herself to them, to anticipate them, and she lets no opportunity pass of showing her a joyous, pleasant submission and respect. That's how she perceives and knows that she loves. In the same way, the person who perceives within herself this intention to please God, and is careful to neglect nothing that can give Him glory, can reasonably believe that she loves God. But how can this be seen by others, for often this interior intention to please God is known only by the soul that experiences it? It's a relationship between God and the soul. How can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity really loves God, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that she loves Him if she keeps His commandments.@

AYou=re right, Sister! that's the very sign Our Lord gave when He said: >If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments.=[2] One of the most authentic signs that we love someone is to submit to his commands. If you see someone careful and exact in obeying every one of God's commandments, then you can say, >There's a Sister who really loves God.=

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think that a Sister from the Charity is obliged to love God?@ After listening patiently to all the reasons spelled out to him by the Sister, M. Vincent summed them up as follows: AOur Sister says that she's seen many reasons, but that God's benefits to her in her vocation have especially touched her, considering that in this state of life we not only keep God's commandments but we also observe His counsels, and it's a vocation in which we profess to love God and our neighbor. That's very touching, dear Sisters, and our Sister was right in seeing in it a powerful motive to prompt her to love God.

AAnd how can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity loves God, Sister?@ When the Sister had finished, M. Vincent added, AOur Sister has just given us a great sign to know whether a Sister loves God: if, as she says, she's careful to keep her Rules. Truly, that's an excellent sign! It's what led one of the Popes to say--and I myself have seen that Pope; it was Clement VIII[3]-->Bring me a religious who kept his Rule, and I won't need any miracles to canonize him; if I have evidence that he kept it, that's enough; I'll place him in the catalogue of the saints.= That's how much this holy Pope respected such a lofty, excellent matter as keeping one's Rule! So then, Sisters, our Sister had good reason to say of the person you see taking care to observe her Rules--not only the house rules, but also those for outside, namely, the care of the sick--that in this we'll know that she loves God. And who could doubt that this Sister loves God if we see her faithful to rising in the morning, making her prayer well, seeing that her patient has his medicine, that the soup is ready, and that everything is carried out properly; and if, after breaking her Rule through human frailty or perhaps from some apparent necessity, she immediately accuses herself of it and asks for a penance? You may be certain, Sisters, that someone who acts like that loves God.

ATell me, Sister, how can a person who already has the love of God grow in holiness and advance in His love?@ After the Sister had answered, M. Vincent added, AOur Sister is saying that one means of increasing and perfecting oneself in the love of God is to be submissive to God and our Superiors, and she speaks the truth. Submissive to God--what an excellent means to grow in His love! If I'm changed, if I'm moved about, it's God who permits it. I take it from His hand and I accept it for love of Him. Let the Superior do whatever he wants with me; I know that he's guided by the Spirit of God, and because I love God I submit to all his orders. What a lovely, excellent practice is the love of God! Our Sister said it well: it's the means of perfecting ourselves in it and of increasing it. The soul in this state is constantly making acts of love, and she does it from what's within her. It's the nature of our heart to love something. It must of necessity love God if it doesn't love the world, for it can't exist without loving. To love the world, *mon Dieu*! what a misfortune! By God's grace, we renounced that at Baptism and later, when God in His infinite mercy called us to His service, so it's natural for us to love God. And all we have to do in order to love Him is simply what our Sister has just said.

ATo this, Sisters, I'll add that there's no place on earth where you can work out your salvation more easily than in your Company; no, not one, provided you do what depends on you and in the way God asks of you. Tell me, please, can you attain a higher degree of virtue than that of our Sisters who have gone to God, have edified us so much, leaving us such a good reputation and such a great example of their holy lives? No, I don't know anywhere you can give more to God, use your energies more freely for His love, and have greater means of growing and perfecting

yourself in it than among yourselves, provided you do what you=re supposed to do.@

The Sister who spoke next gave four reasons, most of which had already been mentioned. AWhen you=re going to repeat what others have already stated,@ noted M. Vincent, Ait will suffice to say, >I had the same thought as Sister X.= So you=re saying, Sister, that you=re obliged to love God because He's infinitely good--and we=ve already mentioned that--and because He's lovable. Now, good and lovable go together, Sister, and come to the same thing, so whoever says good says lovable, and whoever says that God is lovable presupposes that He's good. You add, >Because He heard your prayers and redeemed you.= These are two strong motives that we'll reduce to one, namely, that He created you, and His infinite goodness drew you out of nothingness to make you a reasonable creature, capable of knowing and loving Him and of enjoying His glory for ever and ever. Now that's a powerful motive! I'll love God, yes, I'll love Him, and I'm obliged to do so with good reason, since I am His creature and He is my Creator and Redeemer.@

M. Vincent questioned the Sister on these signs, and after she had spoken, he went on, AOur Sister says that we can see that a Sister loves God if she does all her actions to please Him, that is, if she isn't concerned about what people will say; for, Sisters, there will always be some who find fault with what is done by God's servants. But what people say matters little to holy souls, provided their actions are pleasing to the Divine Majesty. What do you think you=re doing, Sisters, when you carry meals through the streets? You make many persons happy with that pot of soup; you delight good people, who see you on your way to work for God; you delight the poor, who are awaiting their food; and you delight God, who sees you and knows your desire to please Him by doing His work. A father who has a handsome, grown-up son is pleased to watch from a window as the boy walks boldly down the street, and this gives him unimaginable joy. In the same way, Sisters, God sees you, not through a window but everywhere, no matter where you may be, and He watches how you go off to render service to His poor members. If He sees you going about it in the right way with the sole desire of rendering Him service, it gives Him inexpressible joy. It's His great pleasure, His joy, His delight. What a happiness, dear Sisters, to be able to give joy to our Creator!@

After asking some questions on the means of loving God well, M. Vincent continued, ASister is giving us an almost infallible means of loving God; she says that it's to walk always in His presence. That's very true; the more we see someone who is the epitome of good, the more we love him. Now, if we often imagine having God before our eyes, who is beauty and perfection personified, there's no doubt that the longer we look at Him, the more we'll love Him.@

Another Sister, questioned on the reasons for loving God, replied that she had thought of several reasons already mentioned, but felt especially grateful to God because for having called her when she was so young. Most Honored Father noted this, and repeated it several times. She added that one recognized that a person loved God when she obeyed His commandments and that one means of acquiring this love was to be careful not to offend Him.

Another Sister said on the first point, AThe first reason obliging us in a very special way to love God is that this love is the most excellent of all virtues, the one that confers weight and value on all the others, and that God in His goodness has chosen us to love Him by calling us to be Daughters of Charity.

AThe second motive is that, if we don't strive to acquire this holy love, we'll spend our lives in vain, and our works will be counted as nothing.

AThe third is that, if we don't have the love of God, it will be very difficult for us to persevere

in our vocation and to fulfill the obligation of our Rules and the service of the sick in the way we should.

AOn the second point I thought that we'll know whether we love God if, for love of Him, we overcome the difficulties we meet, as well as all those things contrary to our senses, reason, and will, and if we take great care to please God and greatly fear offending Him.

AOn the third point, I saw that one means of acquiring the love of God was to desire it with all our heart and to ask for it earnestly and perseveringly; and one means of increasing it was to make those acts frequently because we do more perfectly those things we practice more.@

After mentioning several reasons already pointed out by others, another Sister added that we can see whether we love God if we are distressed when we offend Him, if we like to speak of Him and, in a word, if our only intention in all our actions is to please Him, principally in matters involving the service we must render to our neighbor, who is His image.

On the third point, she noted that one means of acquiring, and even of increasing, the love of God is the reception of the holy sacraments, especially Holy Eucharist. It's impossible for us to come close to fire without being warmed, provided it be with the necessary disposition, that is, with the desire to give ourselves entirely to God and to ask Him ardently to give us His love.

AI thank God with all my heart for the lights He's given you on the present subject, dear Sisters. They are such that theologians could scarcely say more. They might perhaps say more beautiful things, but not better ones.

AAmong the reasons you cited--and they=re all weighty, important, powerful, and urgent--I'll pause only on one, which seems to me the most moving, namely, that God has commanded us to do this. Wouldn't it be enough if He had permitted it? No, it wasn't enough for His love to permit us to do it; He had to oblige us by an absolute command, involving the punishment of mortal sin for those who transgress it. If a peasant were summoned by a King to be his favorite, and the King commanded him to love him, how obligated he would feel to do so! >Alas! Sire= he=d doubtless say, >I'm not worthy of your consideration. I'm only a poor laborer.= >No matter, I want you to love me.= How greatly the kindness of this King would oblige that poor man to love him, Sisters, and to love him with his whole heart! He=d think of nothing else than the favor bestowed on him by the King.

ANow, God, who is infinitely greater than all the Kings of the earth and in whose sight we=re less than atoms, nevertheless values our love so highly that He wants to have it sole and entire. >You shall love the Lord your God with your whole soul,= He says, >with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your will.= You see, Sisters, He reserves nothing. Note that this is a commandment of sweetness and love, not one of difficulty or constraint. You'll understand this by the following consideration. If the Queen sent for one of you and said, >Come, Sister X, I=ve heard about you. I=ve been told that you=re a good Sister; that's why I sent for you to tell you that I want you to love me, but to love me dearly, and don't fail to do so.= Tell me, Sisters, what would you not do to show the Queen how grateful you were for this favor? Now, you=re certain that God wants you to love Him; He's shown it by His express command and also, as has been said, by choosing you to be Daughters of Charity, which means daughters of the love of God or daughters called and chosen to love God.

AAnother motive you gave is that God fulminates a curse against those who don't love Him. >Let those who do not love God be anathema,= says Saint Paul.[4] A curse on those who don't love God! Yes, Sisters, God attaches such great importance and has such a high opinion of our love that it's His absolute Will that we love Him, and if we don=t, we=re accursed. What threats these

are!

AHere then are two motives that I bring forward, Sisters, so as not to repeat the ones you=ve mentioned: one is God's command that we love Him; the other is the curse with which He threatens those who won't do so.

A >But,= someone will say to me, >all right; we=re quite convinced that we must love God, but what does it mean to love? How can we do it?= To this, dear Sisters, I reply that to love is to wish a person well, to desire that everyone know his merits, have great respect for them, procure for him all the honor and satisfaction within our power, and wish that everyone would do the same and that the person we love may not meet with any misfortune. The more perfect love is, the more sublime and lofty is the good we want for the beloved. Now, as nothing is more perfect than God, it follows that the love we bear Him is a sound and healthy love, tending to want His greater glory and everything that may be for His honor.

ATo understand this clearly, Sisters, you should know that there are two kinds of love: one is called affective, and the other, effective. *Affective* love proceeds from the heart. The person who loves is filled with warmth and affection, is continually aware of the presence of God, finds satisfaction in thinking about Him, and spends her life imperceptibly in such contemplation. Thanks to this love, she does, with no difficulty--and even with pleasure--the most difficult things, and is vigilant and careful concerning anything that can make her pleasing to God; lastly, she basks in this divine love and takes no pleasure in any other thoughts.

ALove is *effective* when we act for God without experiencing its warmth. This love isn't perceptible to the soul; it doesn't feel it, but it still produces its effect and completes its act. This difference, says the Blessed Bishop of Geneva,[5] may be illustrated by the example of a father who has two sons. One is still young. The father hugs him, enjoys playing with him, is delighted to hear him babble, thinks about him when he doesn't see him, feels deeply his little sorrows. If he goes out, he keeps thinking about this child; when he comes home, the first thing he does is to go to see him, and he loves him as Jacob loved his little Benjamin. The other son is a man of twenty-five or thirty years of age, already his own master, who goes where he pleases, comes home when he likes, but sees to the affairs of the house; and it seems as if his father has no tenderness for him and doesn't love him. If there's any hard work, it's this son who does it; if the father is a farm worker, it's this son who will take care of any concerns connected with work in the fields, and will lend a hand with it; if the father is a merchant, this son will work in the business; if the father is a lawyer, this son will manage the practice. And yet it seems as if the father doesn't love him.

AWhen, however, it comes to making provision for him, the father shows clearly that he loves him more than his little boy, whom he hugs so fondly, for he gives the elder the best part of his property and advances him plenty of money. And we see, from the customs of certain regions, that the eldest children get the best part of the family possessions, while the younger ones have only a small portion by law. So it would seem that, although the father has a more tangible, tender love for the little one, he has a more effective love for the older son.

ANow you see, dear Sisters, that's how the Blessed Bishop of Geneva explains these two loves. There are among you some Sisters who really love God, who experience great sweetness in prayer, great pleasure in all their spiritual exercises, great consolation in frequenting the sacraments, and experience no inner conflict, because of their love of God, who enables them to accept with joy and submission all that comes to them from His hand.

AThere are others who don't experience God at all. They never have, they don't know the

meaning of relishing prayer, and they feel like they lack devotion; yet, they don't stop making their prayer or practicing their Rules and the virtues, and they work hard, although with repugnance. Do they stop loving God? No, certainly not, for they do all that the others do and with a love that's all the stronger because they feel it less. This is effective love, which continues to be operative even though it's not apparent. Some poor Sisters become discouraged. They hear that a certain Sister is so fervent, makes her prayer well, and has a deep love of God. They experience none of that; they think all is lost, they don't belong in the Company because they=re not doing what the others are doing, and that it's better for them to leave, since they are there without the love of God.

ANow that's a mistake, dear Sisters. If you=re living your vocation, you can be sure that you love God and that you love Him incomparably more perfectly than those who feel this love deeply but don't do what you do. Note what I=ve just said, Sisters: if you=re living your vocation.

AI see some of you saying to me, >I'm doing nothing, Monsieur; I don't see any progress; nothing that's said or done moves me. I see Sisters so recollected at prayer, and I'm always distracted; if we have spiritual reading, they take so much pleasure in it, and I get bored. This seems to be a sign to me that God doesn't want me here, since He doesn't give me the spirit, as He does to others. I'm only a bad example here.= That's a deceit of the evil spirit, who strives to conceal from you the good you accomplish when you do what depends on you, dear Sisters, although you get no consolation from it.

AThere are some who are troubled when they see others abandoning their vocation. >That Sister left; why should I stay any longer? I'm doing nothing here either. If she works out her salvation well elsewhere, so might I.= And yet, although they are upset by these difficulties, they still do all that depends on them. Don't worry, Sisters. God wills you to be in this state. You don't lack His love since you are acting that way, and it's one of the greatest proofs you could give Him.

AGod's commandment to love Him with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole mind, etc., doesn't mean that He wants the heart and soul always to have a tangible experience of this love. That's a grace His Goodness imparts to whomsoever He pleases. But He intends that all our actions, by an act of the will, be done for love of Him. When you entered the Company, you saw the obligations entailed; you gave yourselves to God to fulfill all of them in His love, and every day you repeat that act. Rest assured, Sisters, that, although you may not enjoy the consolation of feeling the warmth of this love, you can't fail to have it, doing what you do for love of Him.@

ABut how can we make a perpetual act of love, Monsieur?@

AYou may be assured, Sisters, that this can easily be done by four means that I'm going to explain to you.

AThe first means of being in a continual act of the love of God is not to tolerate any bad thoughts and to keep your mind free of them, for they=re very displeasing to God, who is all-pure and holy. If any such thought occurs to you, dismiss it as soon as you perceive it, reflecting that your heart belongs to God alone, who wants nothing soiled or contaminated. There's an easy way to do this. When the clock strikes, remind yourselves that God is calling you and is saying to you, >My daughter, love Me; my daughter, time is passing and eternity is approaching; give Me your heart.= This simple, interior act, Sisters, will put you into the presence of God, cleanse your heart, and help you to make an act of love.

AThe second means--for it's a question of establishing that all Daughters of Charity love God, and love Him always--the second means, I repeat, is never to say anything bad, never to complain, never to murmur, never to engage in conversation harmful to others, neither about those at home nor about those outside the house, and to speak well of God and our neighbor. In this way our hearts will be maintained in the love of God.@

ABut, do I have to be talking about God all the time, Monsieur?@

ANo, no! But when you do speak of Him, let it be with respect and devotion. When you=re together in a place where you can talk, speak to one another of the good you=ve seen, say how good God is and how good it is to love Him, or discuss how to serve Him in order to edify those who listen to you, and even for your own edification; if they hear you talking like this, they won't allow themselves to speak inappropriately.

The other means of loving God is to be faithful in following His rules, which are continual acts of the love of God. As soon as you rise, give your heart to God to practice your Rule and His most holy Will in this; get dressed with the same thought in mind; go to prayer with this desire and sentiment. When you=re out of the house, serve the poor in the manner laid down by the Rule. Rest assured, Sisters, that if you don't fail in this, you=re loving God and are making a continual act of love.

AThe last means of loving God continually and forever is suffering: to bear with illnesses, if God sends them; to endure calumny, if we=re unjustly criticized; to suffer interiorly the trials God sends us to test our fidelity. Good Brother Antoine,[6] a holy man and a great servant of God, whom we=ve seen here, had this practice. When he became ill, he would immediately say, >Welcome, Sister Sickness, since you come from God.= If someone said to him: >Brother Antoine, people say you=re a hypocrite, a real impostor, and you yourself should practice what you preach.= >Welcome, Sister Detraction.= People would come and say to him: >Brother Antoine, many persons are annoyed with you; they say you=re a playboy and are deceiving people.= >Welcome Sister Detraction.= He's the holiest man we=ve seen in our day. He considered everything that caused him pain and distress as being sent by God. Likewise, Sisters, when you=re told that people are dissatisfied with you, or some word or action is falsely attributed to you, say, >Welcome to what has come from my God.= If you=re ill and this prevents you from performing your exercises of piety as you=d like, praise God, who allows it to happen. Do the same thing with any difficulty or opposition you may encounter, remembering, Sisters, that you can't make a more pleasing sacrifice to God than by giving yourselves to Him to endure whatever He pleases to send you.

ASo then, there are four means by which Daughters of Charity will be in a continual act of the love of God, if they practice them. The first--we=ve mentioned it already, but I'll repeat it--is to accustom our heart to form good thoughts, and not allow it to be diverted from them by a thousand vain and useless fantasies or by unclean thoughts. By the grace of God, I don't think you are plagued by them, but rather by thoughts of envy, murmuring, and secret discontent. Oh! how that would separate you from the love of God and give you ideas of abandoning your vocation and of failing God! Watch out, dear Sisters, for they=re very dangerous. If you experience them, try to reject them and take care not to consent to them.

AAnother way of showing God that we love Him is to endure insults, calumnies, and trials--sometimes very annoying ones--that we come up against in our vocation, and which the holy love of God will mitigate. In connection with this, Sisters, don't be surprised when you hear (at these words M. Vincent's tone of voice changed and tears came to his eyes), when you hear that

a Sister has left, ungrateful for the graces God has granted her. Weep for her loss, lament the deplorable state into which she is plunged, and use this example to strengthen yourselves. >But, *mon Dieu*! she was a Sister who was doing so well! She gave so much promise! It surely is the fault of the Company and Superiors.= Beware of coming to the point of doing that, Sisters.

A >But I go beyond that, for I think I could perhaps leave as she did; I'm no better, I'm even more imperfect, I'll never be able to last.= Be very much on your guard against using such language, Sisters. That's bargaining with God, bargaining with yourselves. Should that happen--or even something worse--don't get upset or discuss it with one another, or start wondering about the reasons that led Sisters to leave--for reasons will never be wanting--but renew your act of the love of God and say in your heart, >My God, so it's true that this Sister, whom You had so mercifully called, has abandoned Your service. Alas! What will become of us if You abandon us! If You didn't support me, my God, I would have already done the same, but I trust that you'll never desert me; and I, on my part, will do my utmost to be faithful to You. In the future I'll avoid the company and private complicity that have done me so much harm, and will seek out those who are stronger so that I may profit by their good example and instructions.= That, Sisters, is how you should act.

ADo you know what happens when a Prince revolts against his King, forms a faction, rebels, and takes up arms? As soon as this occurs, all the Princes who don't belong to the faction go to the King and say, >Sire, we heard that a certain person has failed in the fidelity due to Your Majesty. We=ve come to declare that we have no part in this rebellion but are ready, on the contrary, to risk our lives in your service.= Then each one renews his oath of fidelity. Those who are at a distance and can't come send a representative.

AIn the same way, dear Sisters, if you see someone, as I=ve just mentioned to you, who has failed in her promise regarding her vocation, rouse your heart to greater fidelity and say, >No, my God, even if all the Sisters should fail, with the help of Your grace, I'll be steadfast.=

AWell, that's enough for now; I don't have much time and won't delay any longer by explaining the other means to you, in the hope that the goodness of God, who has suggested them to you, will give you the grace to make use of them whenever and wherever you need them. Meanwhile I entreat Him with all my heart to animate all of you with His true and holy love, to give us the infallible marks of it, and to grant us the grace to grow in it ever more and more, so that, aided by this grace, we may begin in this world what we'll be doing eternally in the next, to which we ask the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to lead us.@

42. - LOVE OF WORK

November 28, 1649

ASisters, this conference deals with the importance for Daughters of Charity to work during the time they=re free either from the service of persons who are poor or from teaching children, in places where they=re not too busy. The first point concerns the reasons for working to earn part of their living; the second, the kind of work they should undertake; the third, what they should do so that God may be as pleased with this work as with their assistance to the sick and their other ministries.

AThese are the three points we have to discuss, Sisters. Let's look at the reasons why Daughters of Charity must keep busy in places where they can do so without detriment to the service of the sick poor or to the education of children, as in the villages or in some small parishes in Paris.

ASister, tell us why a Daughter of Charity should work to earn part of her living.@

AOn the first point, it seemed to me, Father, that we must keep busy because Our Lord recommended that we make good use of our time; secondly, because we=re poor; and in the third place, because idleness generates bad thoughts and conversations and often destroys what grace has established in us, and which we might have preserved if we had kept busy. On the second point, it seemed to me that the work we can undertake includes spinning, sewing, and other common occupations, which we don't lack. On the third point, it seemed to me that one good means is to be devoted to it.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI think we should work in imitation of Our Lord who worked so hard when He was on earth. On the second point, I thought, as Sister just mentioned, that occupations such as sewing and spinning are the most suitable ones for us. As for means, I think that care and diligence will be good ones for us, keeping in mind that we always have to work, and always to work as if we had to hurry because, when we go slowly, we don't make much progress, and when we think there's only a little to be done, we=re not concerned with going more quickly.@

AFather,@ added another Sister, Ait seems to me that one reason to inspire us not to waste time is the example of the Blessed Virgin, who was never idle. As for the type of work, I don't see any others than those pointed out by our Sisters, except for the Sisters at the Motherhouse who have special duties and offices. A good means for making our work acceptable to God is to have some good thoughts while we=re working and not to allow ourselves any useless ones.@

AGod bless you, Sister!@ said Most Honored Father. AAnd you, Sister?@

AOne reason why we have to work to earn part of our living is that our vocation has the honor of imitating the laborious life of the Son of God; consequently, since He worked with Saint Joseph and His holy Mother to earn His living, so should we. A second reason is that we don't bring any money with us to the Motherhouse for our subsistence, we must earn our living by our work. A third is that most of us would be obliged to earn our living if we were in the world. A fourth is that this is a good way to establish our Company in solid virtue, especially in humility, which Our Lord so strongly recommended to those who want to follow Him, and which He esteemed so highly that He practiced it himself all His life.@

AIt seems to me, Father,@ stated another Sister, Athat one motive for being concerned with earning part of our living is to imitate Our Lord, Saint Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin His holy mother, who worked all their lives. In addition, our Company professes poverty. A third reason is that, if the belief that we didn't have to work to earn our living was introduced into the Company, we=d soon become lazy and our Company would go to ruin. Lastly, there's nothing so harmful to a good life as idleness.

AOn the second point, namely, the work we should do when we have some leisure time from nursing the sick and looking after the schoolchildren, or the observances of our Rules, it seemed to me that each, according to her ability, could do some of the necessary occupations, such as sewing, spinning, and others that would benefit the house or poor persons, and not things that occupy our mind too much and cause us to become engrossed in them. When I thought over how we should act so that our work may be pleasing to God and helpful to the poor, I thought that, when I begin it, I should make the intention of pleasing God by honoring the work Our Lord Jesus Christ did on earth; and second, not to undertake anything without permission and to be prepared to give up the work when we=re told to do so or when the service of the poor demands it.@

After our most worthy Father, with his usual charity and patience, had heard what each Sister

he had questioned had to say on the subject, he began to speak as follows: ASisters, I thank God for the thoughts His Goodness has given you on the present topic; all of them are good, important, useful, and practical, but, because we don't have much time, I'm not going to dwell on them.

AI'll add just two things that occurred to me, Sisters, one of which is that God has expressly commanded us to earn our living by the sweat of our brow; *in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane*,[1] He said; you shall earn your living by the sweat of your brow, that is, Sisters, by hard, painstaking labor. This commandment is so definite that no one can be exempted from it, and the work such that, by the grace of God, it serves us as a penance by the fatigue it causes the body. God didn't simply say, >You shall labor with the powers of your mind to earn your bread,= but >you shall labor by the sweat of your brow,= you shall not only labor with your mind but with your hands, your arms, your entire body, and you shall work so hard that sweat will drip from your brow. That, dear Sisters, is how we should understand God's commandment, which everyone is bound to obey.

AThe peasant we see going to his plow to till the soil and to produce the grain that will feed people fulfills this commandment, for his body suffers from it and toils at it, with the result that sweat often pours down his face.

AThe Sister from the Charity who goes out morning and evening, carrying her soup pot in hot and cold weather, not for herself but for some poor person who can't go to her for it and who would languish from need if she didn't take it to him, that Sister also fulfils this commandment, dear Sisters.

AThe second reason, Sisters, is that God, addressing the just man, says that he'll live by the work of his hands--as if He had wanted to make us understand that his greatest obligation, after that of rendering to God the service he owes Him, is to work to earn his living--and that He'll bless the pains he takes in such a way that no one will ever see him in need, he'll never be dependent on anyone, he'll live and support his family by the work of his hands, and all will go well with him. God even promises to work with him and, by working, he will bless God.

AThat's how the just man lives, dear Sisters; he lives, in accordance with God's command, by the work of his hands, and is a burden on no one. But the unjust man won't do that; because he won't take the trouble of working, he'll be a burden on others; he'll beg for his livelihood or steal. Note the difference; one is on good terms with God and others; he lives in the observance of the commandments of God and has a sufficiency of the necessities of life; the other is offensive to God, unbearable to decent people, and almost to himself because of the penury to which his idleness reduces him.

AI'm not implying that all those who live comfortably are just, dear Sisters, nor that all those who suffer from want are unjust, because we often see that, by God's permission, the wicked prosper and the good are unsuccessful. I do say, however, that no one has ever seen anyone to whom God hasn't given more than sufficient means of livelihood, when the person has been willing to work for it.

AAs opposed to the blessings God has given to the just, we have the maledictions fulminated by Him in Sacred Scripture against the idle. He refers the slothful to the ants: >Go, you sluggard= He says, >and learn from the ant what you should do.=[2]

AThe ant, dear Sisters, is a little creature to which God has given such foresight that it brings to the community all it can amass during the summer and harvest time, to be used during the winter. You see, dear Sisters, the ant doesn't appropriate it to his personal use but brings it to the

little community storehouse for the others. Bees do the same during the summer. They store up the honey they gather from flowers so they can live on it during the winter; like the ants, they, too, bring it to the community. They=re only tiny creatures, the tiniest on earth, and God has implanted in them this instinct to work, so He refers us to them to learn from their example how to work with foresight.

AThe third reason we have, as was mentioned--*mon Dieu*! it was mentioned and other beautiful ideas were added to it--is this, namely, that God himself works incessantly, has worked incessantly, and will work incessantly. He works from all eternity within himself by the eternal generation of His Son, whom He'll never cease to beget. The Father and the Son have never stopped loving each other, and this mutual love has eternally produced the Holy Spirit, by whom all graces have been, are, and will be distributed to us.

AGod also works incessantly from outside himself in the creation and preservation of this great universe, in the movements of the heavens, in the influences of the stars, in the productions of land and sea, in the nature of the atmosphere, in the regulation of the seasons, and in all that beautiful order we observe in nature, which would be destroyed and return to nothingness if God was not constantly guiding it.

AIn addition to this general work, He toils with each individual: with the craftsman in his shop, with the woman in her household, with the ant and the bee to do their collecting, and He does so constantly and continually. And why does He labor? For us, dear Sisters, only for us, to preserve our lives and to procure for us everything we need. *Eh quoi*! if a God, Emperor of the entire world, has never for a single moment stopped working interiorly and exteriorly ever since the world has been the world, and even in the lowliest of earth's productions, with which He cooperates, how much more reasonable that we, who are His creatures, should work, as He's said, in the sweat of our brow! A God works incessantly, and a Daughter of Charity would remain idle! She=d convince herself that all she has to do is to serve poor persons! And when she has few or none of them, she=d remain idle! Let's be very careful about that, dear Sisters; let's avoid idleness like death--what am I saying? Let's avoid it as we would avoid hell.

A >But we=re busy from morning till night, Monsieur; we scarcely have time to eat our meals, and most often, not on time.= Well and good, dear Sisters. I praise God for that with all my heart. I would hope that it might please His Goodness that all of you would be like that. I know that in Paris there's a great deal of work, that very often three wouldn't suffice for what two have to do, and that if there were forty-eight hours in the day, you=d find plenty to keep you busy; but I'm also well aware that there isn't the same amount of work in the country, that everywhere there aren't enough patients to take up all your time, and that in Paris itself there are parishes where the work isn't so heavy. Granted, there aren't many of these parishes, but there are always a few, and I'm speaking mainly of them, dear Sisters, although you should never waste time in a single one of them.

AIf you really knew the misery entailed by idleness, dear Sisters, you=d avoid it as you would avoid hell. It has been said--and it's true--that it's the cause of bad thoughts and conversations. Alas! that's only too true, Sisters; it's their wet-nurse. How will two persons with nothing to do occupy themselves, if not first of all in useless and dangerous conversations? Then they'll go on to make damaging and disparaging remarks, gossip, fabricate lies, murmur against Superiors, criticize the Rules, speak contemptuously of them and build castles in the air. Don't I myself know what extravagant notions can pass through an idle mind? They'll have a thousand bad thoughts, a thousand unclean fancies about this man or that woman, about some young man they

met--although, by the mercy of God, I know of no such persons among you, dear Sisters, and that His Goodness preserves you from these disorders in a very special way. Yes, we can say to the glory of God that He takes special care to preserve your purity, but this mustn't be abused.

AIdleness also generates petty grudges, problems, and jealousy. Often these are purely imaginary and groundless. An idle person will make a thousand reflections contrary to the respect she owes to God; she'll destroy that peace she ought to make reign in her soul and will form judgments contrary to the charity she owes her neighbor.

AWhat did Our Lord do when He lived on earth, dear Sisters? Someone has said it, so I have little, and almost nothing, to add. I'll simply say that He led two lives on earth. One, from His birth until His thirtieth year, during which He worked to earn His living in the sweat of His divine brow. His trade was that of a carpenter; he was a hod carrier, an unskilled laborer, and a bricklayer's assistant. From His youth He worked from morning till night and continued until He died. Heaven and earth blush with shame at the sight of such a spectacle.

AThat, dear Sisters, is how God acted--God, the Sovereign Lord of the whole world, to whom all creatures owe infinite honor. We see Him living by the work of His hands, in the lowliest and most difficult occupation there was; and we, wretched, miserable creatures, we would be useless! And a Daughter of Charity would want to spare herself!

AThe other stage of the life of Jesus Christ on earth is from the age of thirty until His death. During those three years what did He not do, day and night, going off to preach without a break, now in the temple, now in a village, in order to convert the world and to win over souls to His Father? During that time, what do you think He lived on, dear Sisters? He possessed nothing on earth, not even a stone on which to lay His divine head, in which Eternal Wisdom dwelt. So, He lived on the alms given Him by Mary Magdalen and the other devout women who followed Him to listen to His sermons. He went to the homes of those who invited Him and continued to work day and night and at all hours, sometimes going to places where He knew souls might be won, sometimes to the home of a sick person, to heal first his body, then his soul. In this, He wanted to point out two stages to the Daughters of Charity who serve the sick: one, during which they look after their temporal needs, and the other, while serving them or after having done so, during which time they may say some good word to encourage them to make a good confession, to prepare them to die well, or to take good resolutions to lead a better life, in the event that God should restore them to health. To act in this way, dear Sisters, is to imitate Our Lord's conduct on earth; and to earn your living in this way, without wasting time, is to earn it as Our Lord did.

ASaint Paul, that great Apostle and thoroughly divine man, that vessel of election, earned his living by the work of his hands. In the midst of his heavy labors, his important ministries, his continual preaching, he took time, either by night or by day, to be self-sufficient so as not to have to ask for anything from anyone. >You know,= he says in one of his talks, >that I=ve demanded nothing of you, and that the bread I eat to sustain my body was earned by my own hands.=[3] Who will not blush with shame at such an example? It wasn't a young woman who was speaking, nor an ordinary man, but a man of good social standing by birth, learning, and virtue; and this man had such a high opinion of the holy poverty taught by Jesus Christ that he would have scrupled eating a piece of bread that he had not earned. If his important ministries didn't allow him to work during the day, he=d take some time from his night's rest.

AIn those days it was a holy custom in the Church for everyone to work. In the beginning, members of religious Orders earned their own living. After assisting at Divine Office, they busied themselves making mats and wicker baskets, which they would sell. And this was done

even in Saint Bernard's day; four hundred years ago his religious and he himself worked. But, since everything grows slack with time, this holy custom was done away with, and that has had serious consequences, for since then domestic discipline has ceased to be as austere as when religious were subject to work.

ANow, do you see, dear Sisters, how good it is for you to work, for then you=re no burden in the places to which you=re called? That's an important point because, that being the case, you can always render service to God, and with commendation, even though you shouldn't seek it. You won't be obliged to ask for more than people can give you. And should you happen to have more than you need, you know that the surplus is used to form other young women who will one day render service to God as you do and will serve their neighbor, and God will be glorified by them. Members of religious Orders render service to God and are the support of the Church, but most of them--at least those in the mendicant Orders--are dependent. It's true that they do no wrong in this because that's their Rule. Take, for instance, the Franciscans, who practice such strict poverty; such a life is great in the sight of God, but they=re dependent and possess nothing; they live in destitution and poverty because they have no endowments. But you, you can earn a sufficient livelihood by serving your neighbor; you=re not a burden on anyone; you provide for yourselves. Would to God that I could do the same, I who am unworthy of the bread I eat; would that it were permissible for me to earn my living and to be able to serve my neighbor without possessing anything or being dependent on anyone! Would to God that our priests could do so and that we were obliged to forsake everything we have! God knows how willingly we=d do so. But we can=t, and we have to humble ourselves because of it.

AIf God is pleased to grant you the grace of being able some day to earn your living, dear Sisters, and to be able to serve villages that are unable to support you, I know of nothing more beautiful. *Quoi*! by working for others, Sisters will be in a place where they'll be serving poor persons and educating girls with no contributions whatever, able to do so thanks to the work they themselves have done during their free time! What a favor, Sisters, and what a blessing of God that you who are already in a village or in the parishes, serving persons who are poor and teaching children, contribute by your work to help others do the same good in the future by bringing your surplus to the Community! If, as we=ve already seen, bees do this by gathering honey from flowers and taking it back to the hive to feed the others, why wouldn't you, who should be like heavenly bees, do likewise? If God is pleased, Sisters, to grant this grace to your Company, that, through you, poor persons will be served, children instructed, and this house enabled to subsist as it has hitherto done and to admit and form the young women who present themselves with the intention of serving God, and who, in their turn, will render Him the same services as you do, won't that be a great happiness for you? You=re obliged to do this, as far as you can, dear Sisters; at least you should never neglect to do anything for this purpose. Let each of you say to herself, >This is the house in which I=ve been raised; they did me the kindness of accepting me and welcoming me here; it's only reasonable for me to do my share in defraying its expenses so that it can continue to extend the same charity to the Sisters who come after us, and the Company may not stop nor discontinue the good it has begun.=

AThat good is substantial, Sisters, greater than you could imagine or than I can express. Take, for instance, two Sisters living in a parish; what do they not do? What do we hear people say of their way of life? It's a life absolutely divine, a life like Jesus Christ led on earth; God works continually with them, and He really must, dear Sisters, for they wouldn't be able to do what they=re doing. I'm thinking right now of two of our Sisters, who are in a place where they don't

have much to do and have enough to live on; I'm worried about them and fear that this may be an occasion for them to grow lax and become lazy. I=d prefer that the foundation had not been made, dear Sisters, because that will cause the ruin of your Company. When our Sisters are comfortably established and don't have enough to do, they'll neglect the work they do have and won't bother going to visit the poor. Then we'll have to say good-bye to the Charity; it's no longer the Charity; it's buried; then we'll have the funeral of the Charity. That's what will happen if God doesn't maintain it. I myself won't see it, for I won't be on this earth much longer; but you, to whom God will give a long life, you'll see it.

ASo, give yourselves to God, dear Sisters, to work earnestly, in imitation of His Divine Majesty who works unceasingly, although He needs nothing; and, like the bees, bring your surplus to the Community so that, once you=ve made provision for your own needs, you'll be contributing to the formation of other Sisters.

A >But what jobs can we do? We can't undertake something that requires a lot of time; furthermore, we don't know how to do everything people may give us to do.= My reply to that, Sisters, is that sewing and spinning are the most suitable jobs you can do. Everyone needs linen, and you can be sure that, if you take on that kind of work, you'll always have plenty to do, either for your own use, or for the poor, or for children, or others; you'll never be without it.

A >But what should we do to make this work pleasing to Our Lord?= Someone said it, dear Sisters, and such beautiful remarks have been added to that. In the first place, you must work to please God, who takes His joy and delight in seeing you busily engaged for a good purpose. Now, rest assured that your aim is pleasing to Him. So have no doubts that you=re doing something acceptable to God.

ASecondly, the goal of your work should be to honor the painful, exhausting toil of Our Lord on earth, who lent His divine body to the heaviest labors, without sparing himself.

AIn the third place, you must do it with the thought that you=re working to serve your neighbor, who is so dear to God that He considers as done to himself whatever is done for the relief of others.

AIn the fourth place, we have to rid ourselves of the spirit of avarice. Someone made a good remark when she said that we mustn't have things with a view to profit. *O mon Dieu*! no! that would spoil everything. If a Daughter of Charity planned, by working, to amass one *écu* after another in order to have money on hand or to be better fed, that would be displeasing to God and would give bad example to good people.

A >Monsieur,= a gentleman said to me yesterday, >for the last eight years I=ve given myself to God not to make any profit from my possessions. Once I'm fed and clothed, I give the surplus to the poor. I'm well aware that I won't be able to provide a position for my son, but I couldn't act otherwise.= He's a man of the world, dear Sisters, who doesn't have to do anything, and who has children; yet, after simply providing himself with the necessities of life, he gives everything else to the poor, even going so far as to sell and mortgage his property. We should sell ourselves to rescue our brothers and sisters from destitution, and would a Daughter of Charity be so despicable as to reserve something for herself and say, >How do I know what may happen? I may not always be a member of the Company; if I should leave it, I=d always have this.= Oh! that cursed >How do I know!= A damnable idea, suggested by the demon to be an occasion for the downfall of those Sisters who would listen to him! It's not that I'm aware that any of you are so inclined; I know that all of you are attached to the Motherhouse and well disposed in its regard.

AI ask God, who, from all eternity, worked within himself; I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who worked here on earth, even as a laborer; I ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to work hard; I ask Saint Paul, who earned by the work of his hands the bread on which he subsisted; I ask all those holy religious who did manual labor and achieved sanctity that it may please the goodness of God to forgive us for the time we=ve so often wasted, especially myself, who am most unworthy of the bread I eat and which God gives me; I repeat, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the grace to work in imitation of Him; I ask the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to obtain this grace for us from the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name and on whose infinite goodness I rely, I will now pronounce the words of blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

43. - HOW TO ACT AMID DIFFICULTIES<R>WHEN FAR FROM THE MOTHERHOUSE

April 19, 1650

AThe subject of the present conference, dear Sisters, is what Daughters of Charity should do when they are living away from the Mother House, especially in the country and in very distant places, and have a temporal or spiritual difficulty; for instance, when they=re in doubt and are distressed interiorly concerning their Rules--for, at times some are contradictory in their ministries--or difficulties regarding imperfections, inconveniences, or devotional practices, and especially confession, Communion, physical mortifications, and interior communications.

AThe topic is divided into three points, Sisters. The first deals with the reasons we have for knowing clearly how to act when such difficulties arise outside the Motherhouse; the second, what we should do in those circumstances; the third, what each Sister has done when she found herself in similar trials, and some resolutions to take on this point for the future.

AThis conference, Sisters, doesn't concern the Sisters of this house nor the ones who live in Paris, because they=re at the source of the remedies, but only those living in the country, especially in very distant places, where they=re perhaps deprived of any consolation and unable to have the problem solved by their Superiors because the matter is too urgent and the distance too great. But because each and every one of you should be ready to set off at once to wherever you may be sent, it's good for each of you to know what she should do if she finds herself in a place where she might have this need.

AIsn't it important, Sister,@ said M. Vincent, turning to a Sister, Afor us to know how we should act when we=re far from the Motherhouse and some difficulty arises for which we may need advice?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that one reason for wanting to be informed about what we have to do in such needs is that it will put our minds very much at ease if we are.@

AAnd what would you do, Sister, if some trial or temptation arose when you were far away and didn't know where to turn for advice?@

ASince we don't go alone to places, I think it would be appropriate, Monsieur, to mention it to the Sister with whom I=d be living.@

AYes, Sister, you=re right, but it should be done prudently and according to the nature of the matter. If, for instance, it concerns the care of the sick or the instruction of children, you may--and even should--say something like, >*Mon Dieu*! Sister, I'm worried because it seems as if the care of the patients here isn't what I=ve seen it to be elsewhere; I notice a certain abuse. What do you think? Can't we do something about it?= The same for schools. But if the problem were such that the Sister might not be able to suggest any way to solve it, or even if it were prudent to

conceal it from her, then you might say to her, >Please don't worry if you see that I'm a little sad, Sister; I have something on my mind. Just pray for me. I hope from the goodness of God that this will pass, but I'm so weak that I can't help showing it.=

AYou also said that you should have confidence in the person given you as your spiritual guide, Sister. Yes; in fact, that's a great means of setting your mind at rest. If you think of something that's bothering you, for which you may feel the need of advice, turn confidently to him. God won't allow him to say anything that isn't for your good.@

When another Sister remarked that it was good to put one's mind at rest and to try to be patient, M. Vincent added, ASister has said, and rightly so, that once you=ve think you=ve done all you should have on that point, if you=ve told another Sister about your trouble and no remedy is found for it, or if it should be something we may not share with her without worrying her, and if you=ve mentioned it to the confessor appointed by your Superiors and you=re still not at peace, then you have to believe that God is allowing it to be this way, adore His guidance, practice patience, and strive to preserve peace of mind amid worry or temptation.@

Another Sister said that she had found no better means than to kneel at the foot of the crucifix and tell her troubles to Our Lord with confidence and submission, resigning herself to His holy Will. AYou=re so very right, Sister, and that's one of the best means you could find to do the Will of God and to be at peace. That has been the practice of nearly all the saints. I remember that the late wife of the General of the Galleys[1] used to do that. Once, her confessor[2] was traveling to a place fifty leagues away, and she said to him, >Well, Monsieur, you=re going away; to whom shall I turn in my troubles?= >Madame,= he replied, >God will provide. You could go to Monsieur X and Monsieur Y, the former for your ordinary confessions, and the latter for advice if the other one doesn't satisfy you; and if neither of them brings you peace of soul, I advise you, Madame, to seek it at the foot of the crucifix. There you will lovingly present all your difficulties to the Son of God, you will make acts of trust and of resignation to His good pleasure, honoring the abandonment in which He found himself when in a similar state, deserted by those who had the greatest obligations toward Him, and deprived of all tangible consolation to the point where He believed himself abandoned by His Eternal Father. There you will contemplate the use He made of His sufferings, Madame, and, with the help of His grace, you'll have a happier outcome than I can tell you.=

AThis good lady did as she was told, Sisters, and a few days later she wrote to her confessor: >I=ve tried the means you suggested for finding peace of mind in my troubles, Monsieur, but I=ve found none better than that of kneeling at the foot of a crucifix. What men said to me wasn't what I was looking for, but I did find it there, along with all the consolation that creatures were unable to give me.=

AThat's the only remedy, Sisters, and if you=ve ever tried it, I'm sure you'll never find one that's more efficacious. You were truly inspired, Sister, and I ask God to bless you.

AYou, Sister, sitting next to her, please tell us what a Sister should do when she finds herself far away, is troubled in mind, and doesn't know where to turn for advice.@

AI think, Monsieur, that the simplest thing is to put ourselves in the hands of God and to trust in His goodness. In addition, it seems to me that if we=re living with a Sister we trust, we can ask her permission to write to Superiors.@

ABlessed be God! Sister confirms what the other Sister just said about the peace to be found in abandoning yourself to God, and she added that it's well to write about the matter. Now,

Sisters, you should know that when you want to write to a relative, a friend, or someone else, you have to ask the Sister Servant's permission, and, once the letter is written, to give it to her to be sent if she thinks fit, or to be retained, if she thinks it better to do so. This is done in all well-regulated Communities, and we do the same at our house. Not one of our priests or Brothers would write to anyone whomsoever without first coming to ask permission, then bringing me the letter, which I read and either send or keep, depending on the circumstances. If I'm not there, they go to the other Superiors, who do the same. >But that's very hard, Monsieur. *Quoi*! I write something (which doesn't happen very often) and my letters must be read, and they risk not being sent if they=re not acceptable!= Yes, Sisters, it has to be that way; otherwise there would be no order: one would write in her own style, and someone else in another. That's the custom in all well-regulated houses. But when it's a question of writing to Superiors or to the Directress, then, Sisters, there's no need to ask for permission nor to show your letters to anyone. You=re absolutely free to write to them; you should even do so whenever you feel the need, without having to ask the Sister Servant's permission, and she must have nothing to say about it because that's the order that has to be preserved.

AThe same is true for letters that come in; when they arrive, you shouldn't read them until the Sister Servant has first seen them, nor should they be given or sent to the Sister to whom they=re addressed. That's what's done everywhere. Do you think that in our house a letter is given to anyone but me? All letters for individuals are first brought to me and, when I=ve read them, I give or keep them, as I think fit. But when you get a letter from Superiors or from the Superioress, the Sister Servant has no right to read it; she should deliver it, sealed, the moment she receives it, and if the Sister says to her, >Sister, would you like to read this?= she mustn't do it but say to her, >I=d better not, Sister; it belongs to you, and I shouldn't touch it.= @

At this point M. Vincent was called away on some urgent business and left M. Portail to speak in his place. AYou=re really going to be deprived, Sisters, because M. Vincent left you on such a beautiful path. You had begun to taste the sweetness of his words and suddenly you=ve been cut off from them. You=re left with me now, and I'm just the opposite from him. But I'm under obedience, and maybe he'll be able to come back to finish what he started. If he does, you'll be very fortunate. Meanwhile, since he has given orders, we'll say what God will inspire us on the topic that's being discussed.

APlease tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AMonsieur, the first reason that occurred to me for knowing how we should act when in difficulty and at a distance from the Motherhouse is that, if we didn't know, we=d be in danger of displeasing God by acting contrary to what we=re supposed to do because we weren't duly informed. This might cause us great interior distress and keep us from being at peace with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves and, consequently, would separate us from God, who dwells only in a place of peace.

ASecondly, we put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation because, if we don't know how to act amid great difficulties, we'll easily allow ourselves to go to persons who, not having the spirit of the Motherhouse, might advise us to do the opposite of what we=re supposed to do, and that would bring about our total ruin. When, on the contrary, we=re well informed as to how to act in such circumstances, we'll be preserved in the spirit of the Company wherever we may be.

AOn the second point, I thought, with regard to material things, that, if we=re near the Motherhouse, it's well to come and tell our Superiors what we think, with the intention of following their advice; and if we=re so far away that we can't come, we should place ourselves

in the presence of God and, after asking His assistance, do what His Goodness will inspire us to do and what we think is permitted by our Superiors. For spiritual matters and interior trials, however, I think we should seek consolation entirely in God, accept them cheerfully for love of Him without worrying about them, and bear with them as long as it pleases Him; and we shouldn't appear to be in a bad mood or let our Sisters notice anything. To be in this state, I think I have to ask it earnestly of God, and that was my resolution, with the help of His holy grace.@

AOur Sister has mentioned a very compelling and remarkable motive, and we should study it a little. She says that, if we didn't know the right thing to do, we=d put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation. Maybe that's more serious than you think, Sisters, for you shouldn't say to yourselves, >If I weren't in that place, I=d be somewhere else, where I could work out my salvation just as well; people are saved everywhere.= Bear in mind, Sisters, that someone who loses her vocation is like a fish out of water. A fish can't live very long out of the water; it dies immediately. Why? Because water is its element, and it's out of it. In the same way, the Community is the element of Daughters of Charity who are called to it. As long as they remain in it, they=re alive and have the grace to work out their salvation, but if they=re out of it, they don't know what to do any more, and most of those who abandon their vocation are lost, if God doesn't rescue them by a very extraordinary act of mercy. I don't mean only those who leave from this house, but, in general, all the men and women who abandon their vocation, wherever they=ve been called, for they=re all unfaithful to God and insult Him by spurning the graces He gave them and not using them as they should.

AIn connection with this, I have to tell you something, although I do so with great sorrow because it concerns a man who was one of us; but that doesn't matter, it will help you to see how dangerous it is to lose one's vocation. A young man from a good family, addicted to immorality and worldly vanity, was placed with us by his father, who feared his bad conduct. For nearly a year he was confined to a room, where no one saw him except a member of the house, to make him aware of his duty. He was there like a prisoner. Toward the end of the year, he was touched by God and felt a great desire not only never to return to his excesses but to do penance for them, withdraw from the world entirely, and serve God in the Congregation of the Mission. After persevering for some time in this desire, he was admitted. He did very well and everyone was edified by him. He was always to be seen performing acts of humility and seeking the things that were lowly and humble. When he made repetition of prayer, we thought we were listening to an angel. His fervor and devotion were unparalleled.

AThat lasted about two years. After that he began to grow lax, then to do everything negligently and to slip back. He was ruined by the company of certain bad persons who had no great love for the Community. He left on the pretext of doing better elsewhere. He wore his cassock and still seemed to want to be a priest, but soon went back to the ways of the world. He rode about on horseback and behaved quite differently from the way a man of God should act. He was a courtier-clergyman. He slipped again, for I saw him yesterday without any ecclesiastical attire; he was dressed as a cavalry man and was about to set out for the army.

ANow, please tell me, isn't it true that his salvation is in jeopardy? Perhaps he'll be killed, and God knows in what condition, for he no longer has the sentiments of piety he formerly manifested. Now he talks like a freethinker and an atheist; he's beginning to have doubts and says he doesn't believe in much of anything. That's the state of a man who has lost his vocation, but who once seemed like an angel.

ASo, dear Sister, you were right to say that, by not knowing what we=re supposed to do, we

put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation; and also for remarking that this is a great misfortune, for doubtless the greatest misfortune that could befall a person called by God to serve Him in a certain way of life would be to abandon it. We rarely ever fall into such a state when we continue to observe the sound customs that the Rules and Superiors teach us. I=ve noticed that, in the ten to twelve years I=ve had the honor of serving the Company, most of the Sisters who have left did so because they didn't consult others in their difficulties. Some wanted a different ministry, others wanted another companion. We harbor aversions and don't mention them. This festers in our hearts. We have trouble with one Rule that we don't know how to reconcile with another, for occasionally there are Rules that contradict one another and, by failing to seek clarification, we fall into abuses and weariness. We go to confession and never say a word about this. Meanwhile, our minds continue to be troubled. Should some unexpected occasion arise, we lay down our arms. I=ve spent a little extra time on this point because it's very important.@

Another Sister said that it seemed to her that, when we=re deprived of assistance, one good means is to offer God a Holy Communion that He may be pleased to consider our troubles or distress.

M. Portail questioned another Sister, who then asked two questions. The first was whether, whenever we feel upset, it might not be advisable, before anything else, to begin by going to Holy Communion, before seeking a remedy elsewhere.

AYou=re right, dear Sister,@ replied M. Portail. AIt's well to begin with that. Prayer is excellent; it's good to kneel before a crucifix, but it's even better to be united with God in Holy Communion. The other means are only accessory; this is the principal one. After that, if the trial persists, we'll have greater strength to endure it, and the prayer we make will be more efficacious. If we find it hard to say what's bothering us, this will make it easier for us; if we=re in a place where we have no one, God will inspire us; but, as long as you=re at the Motherhouse, Sisters, confide in your Superioress or in your Directress; they have the spirit of God to guide you and they will obtain it for the Sisters they'll give you wherever you go, and you should look upon it as certain that you'll never be mistaken in following their advice. We should have greater confidence in the Superiors God has given us than in an angel from heaven because it's through them that God tells us what He wills of us. He has said so himself: >Whoever hears you, hears me.=[3] If, on the one side, you saw an angel, who was ordering you to do something, and Our Lord should tell you to do something else, you=d be obliged to ignore what the angel might say to you, in order to do what Our Lord would tell you.

ABut, to benefit by what your Superiors say, dear Sisters, go to them with a right intention in order to become better, not out of spite or revenge, or to vent your anger and show resentment and aversion, or out of some kind of bravado. Sisters who would go to Superiors without the right intention, far from leaving their concerns there, would carry back additional ones. Go to them in a straightforward way, with the intention of carrying out punctually all they may tell you to do, looking on your Superior as God, listening to him and obeying him as you=d obey God. In this way you can rest assured that God will bless your compliance and give you the peace of mind you=re seeking.@

The other question was to know whether, when we=re living far away and those who have made the establishment of the house or contributed to it need our assistance, we should give it to them at the expense of our service of the poor. This was discussed in various ways. Mademoiselle cited the Rule by which we=re forbidden to serve rich persons who have the

means of being served by others. M. Portail advised us to excuse ourselves courteously from doing so, alleging the danger into which poor persons might fall if they didn't get food or medicine at the proper time. He added that, if the service requested could be rendered outside the time we serve the poor and was simply a case of assistance to the sick, such as preparing soups or medicines, we could do it, provided it happened rarely, didn't take up much time, and didn't do a disservice to the local surgeons.

When another Sister was questioned, she replied, AThe first reason for being informed of how to act when problems arise for us in distant places is so that we won't do anything inappropriate or harmful to the Company, our neighbor, or ourselves. Another reason is that this keeps us in conformity with the spirit and line of conduct of the Company; for, if some difficulty should arise, I=d reflect before God as to what would be for His greater glory and would try to remember what I heard my Superiors say on similar topics, in order to judge from that what I could do to act in conformity with their intentions. If the matter were such that I could mention it to the Sister with whom I was living, I=d talk it over with her in the hope that God would give her His Spirit for that; if it was a matter of conscience, I=d confess whatever sin I recognized, make the resolution to give it up, and try to put my mind at rest. My resolution was to do my utmost, with the help of God, to acquire the spirit of the Company and its maxims during the time I have the happiness of being at the Motherhouse, so that I can make use of them when God permits me to be far away from it.@

ANow there's a motive,@ said M. Portail, Athat hasn't yet been mentioned, namely, uniformity. You must conform yourselves to the spirit of the Motherhouse so that you will not only be recognized by your attire and headdress but also by the way you act. You see how necessary that is, dear Sisters, so please pay close attention to it. That's why you have to train yourselves in this. Soldiers going to war are in training before they leave, and even in peace time they still have to carry out military exercises frequently. And why do they have to do that, if not to be fully experienced when they have to go into battle? For, if they hadn't drilled beforehand, it's to be feared that they=d lack experience at the time they go off to war. Now, the Daughters of Charity wage war against the devil by the instructions they give the sick poor, when they go to visit them and teach them about God and the chief mysteries of our religion; this is what helps persons who are poor to think of their salvation and avoid the sins that put them in the power of the devil. They also wage war against him by teaching little girls, in whom they instill the fear of God and the desire of virtue. Above all, they wage war against him by the good example they give by their charity in assisting their neighbor, by their modesty, their humility, and all the other virtues they practice.@

43a. - INDIFFERENCE

July 14 [1650][1]

ASo then, Sisters, the topic of the present conference is indifference, dealing with the disposition a Daughter of Charity should have to go any place whatsoever, whether she be sent or called there, and with any Sister, and the means of keeping themselves from yielding to the weaknesses that could make them want to leave there.

ASister, would you please tell me your thoughts on this?@

AAs for the reasons we have for going any place whatsoever, I thought that it's to obey the Will of God; to keep the promises we made on entering the Company, when we were told we=d have to go wherever we might be sent; and to imitate the Apostles, who went everywhere without any repugnance. As for the Sisters, I think we must have no preference, but accept all of

them cheerfully, always putting the blame on ourselves for any difficulties that may arise.@

On the same topic, another Sister said, AThe first reason we have for going where we=re sent and for accepting the Sister with whom we'll be living is that we=re obliged to live under obedience and are assured that this is how we do God's Will and work out our salvation. Furthermore, it's by changing places that we imitate the life of the Apostles because, just as they went about to preach Jesus crucified, we also must go to many places and, by our good example, proclaim that there is a God for whom we=re working. As for Sister companions, we should all have the same spirit, and by this means, we won't have any difficulty being with one or the other Sister.@

AOn the reasons we have for going wherever our Superiors may think fit,@ remarked another Sister, Ait seemed to me that we dispose ourselves for this by acquiring great charity and forbearance in order to be tolerant with those who may not be according to our spirit.@

On the same point, another Sister added that the virtue of obedience obliges us to do this, as well as the good example we should give, and our participation in the merit of the Community.

AAn additional reason,@ noted a Sister, Afor being always disposed to go anywhere and with any Sister whomsoever is to reflect that we=ve given ourselves to God to that end, and that wherever we go we'll find God and glorify Him, if we=re faithful to what He asks of us. A further reason is that, although we may be far from the Motherhouse and our Sisters, we=re always united with them and share in all the good done there. A third reason is that no matter which Sister we may be with, it's God who has united us with her; consequently, it's for our advancement. If her temperament seems incompatible with ours, we can think that God has permitted this to give us the opportunity to practice virtue, especially gentleness and patience, and that the saints would have been pleased to have similar opportunities of practicing virtue, since we know that some of them obliged themselves voluntarily to live with bad-tempered persons in order to glorify God by the submission they manifested toward them.@

When Mademoiselle was asked by Most Honored Father to say what inspirations God had given her on this subject, she replied, AAs the first reason we have for being always and at all times disposed to go everywhere and with any of our Sisters, I thought that this disposition was absolutely necessary in order to be faithful to God's plan in establishing this Company, which otherwise couldn't give Him the glory His Goodness wills to draw from it, nor the service we owe to persons who are poor. The second reason is that by this disposition we lend credence to the truth of the attribute God gives himself, namely, that He is a jealous God, who wants our heart entirely, and that we=re prepared without reserve to do His holy Will, made known infallibly to us by that of our Superiors. The third is that, without this disposition, a Daughter of Charity can't truly be said to be a member of the Company, since her example alone, if it were followed, would be capable of causing great hindrances and disorders to all the others. It's even to be feared that it might be the beginning of the total ruin of the Company.@

The second point concerned what Daughters of Charity must do to prevent themselves from yielding to those weaknesses and the flightiness that might lead them to want to be separated from their Sister.

On this point a Sister said, AI thought that what we can do to remedy those weaknesses and the flightiness that enter our minds is to place ourselves at the foot of the Cross and reflect on the sufferings of the Son of God in the difficulties that arise.@

AIt seemed to me,@ noted another Sister, Athat the means to remedy such weakness and flightiness is to regret them as soon as we become aware of them, without dwelling on them any

longer.@

AIt seemed to me,@ added another Sister, Athat one good means of thwarting the influence of these weaknesses and flightiness is not to tell our little difficulties to laypersons because they might suggest solutions harmful to our situation, but we should rather tell them to our Superiors.@

Another Sister stated that she saw no more sovereign remedy against the harm that might be caused by these weaknesses and flightiness than a great desire to suffer, which would stifle all our repugnances and keep us from mentioning them to anyone but our Superiors.

Another Sister said that when these thoughts arise, it's well to think that this is God's Will, to adore this same Will, to regard as a temptation any thoughts that might persuade us to the contrary, and to ask God's help not to give in to them.

To this Mademoiselle added, AOne of the means to keep ourselves from having dispositions contrary to that is to offer ourselves frequently and unreservedly to God in our prayers and Holy Communions. Another means is, as soon as we perceive any sort of aversion or dislike for the place where we=re sent or for the persons with whom we=re placed, even for our Sister--or some of our Sisters if there are several of us--is not to allow this passion to take root but to take care in the beginning to make contrary acts, to go to Communion with this intention, and, if we don't feel that this gives us strength, to examine carefully where that might come from, to ask God's forgiveness for it, and to be renewed by the thought of the first fervor that made us give ourselves to God. If, however, this were to continue for any length of time, we should tell our Superiors about our temptations and about ourselves, and follow exactly the advice God will allow them to give us, humbly asking Him for the grace to do it, and praying to the Blessed Virgin and our Guardian Angel for the same intention.@

After all the Sisters questioned had spoken (we haven't mentioned all of them because several gave the same thoughts), Most Honored Father began to speak as follows: ABefore anything else, Sisters, I'm going to tell you how you should give an account of your mental prayer. Those who can write should put it down on paper: the conference is on such and such a subject; the first point is such and such; the first reason that occurred to me on this was such and such; the second, this or that; and so on. After that will come the second point, which concerns the means. Mention the first means, then the second, the third, and the fourth, separating the second from the first and the third from the second, so as to make the meaning clear. I think it would be well, Sisters, to have a special conference, for which you need not prepare, in order to have to give some reasons spontaneously. Not that you haven=t, by God's mercy, grasped the points of the present conference, dear Sisters, and chosen motives and means that are all pertinent to the topic. That's obvious, by the grace of God. I thank Him for this with all my heart, and I ask His Divine Goodness to imprint on the heart of each one of you what has been said and what will be said at this present conference.

ASome of you have given such very good reasons, so well perceived and carefully thought out that a preacher couldn't have done better; and that can be said of all of you. Yes, all, every single one of you, Sisters, have given satisfactory motives and means, both those who have written and those who have spoken. We can say that God has enlightened all of you and that you have all discovered the secrets for fighting your enemy--other than those who weren't informed on time to make their prayer on this, and that's my fault, because I should have told you about it sooner.

AOne of you said that it was the Will of God that Daughters of Charity should go wherever they=re sent, and she was certainly right. May God be pleased to bless her! It's God's Will that

the Daughters of Charity should come and go to this parish, this village, this hospital, or any other place, without being concerned or worried about whether she'll be with this Sister or another, for a long time or for a short time. You should have no doubt, Sisters, that this is the Will of God; and, as has been so well remarked, that it's what He has willed for the Company from the time when, in His infinite goodness, He first brought it into existence. And, since it is the Will of God, which we know by the blessing He gives to the ministries to which He allows you to be called, why should anyone be unwilling to do it, or not want to do it gladly? For what should we be doing in this world but the most holy Will of God? As has been said, Our Lord came on earth only to do it. *Mon Dieu*! such a beautiful remark! May God be blessed for having given that thought to one of our Sisters, and may God bless her for having said it to us! I don't remember who mentioned it, but, whoever she is, may God be pleased to bless her!

ASo, Jesus Christ came into the world only to do the Will of His Father, and did nothing else all His life; and will a Daughter of Charity, who should model herself on Jesus Christ, want to do anything other than God's Will? >But, Monsieur,= someone will say, >what's the use of doing God's Will?= What's the use, Sister? If a soul in this world could see it, she wouldn't find difficulties enough to satisfy her; she wouldn't find anything painful enough; she wouldn't see enough trials, so much would she want to embrace them in order to do the Will of God.

AThat, dear Sisters, gives glory to God by rendering Him the submission that a creature owes its Creator and in which He finds His joy and pleasure. Yes, Sisters, it gives joy to God and He takes His delight in it. This is a truth sanctioned by Holy Scripture; so much so, that, bearing in mind the Will of God, when you hear from the mouth of your Superior that you must go to a certain place, and you adore this same divine Will, going cheerfully wherever you=ve been told, without wondering whether you'll be far from the Motherhouse or be separated from your relatives, whether you'll ever see them again, if you'll be going with a Sister for whom you have no great liking; when you surmount all that by your desire to do the Will of God, Sisters, you give joy to God, who takes His pleasure and delight in you; you give joy to the angels, who rejoice at the glory God draws from the obedience a poor creature renders to His holy Will, and you give joy to the saints, who share God's joy. Look how far that goes, Sisters: to give joy to God, to give joy to the angels, and to give joy to the saints!

AThis truth is based on Holy Scripture, which states that the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner does penance on earth.[2] And what greater penance is there than to be ready at any moment to set out and leave all to go to a place where you=ve never been, with persons you=ve never seen, leaving behind others with whom you were getting along so well! Have no doubt that the angels and saints rejoice at this.

AIf God, the angels, and the saints rejoice, the devils and the damned are, on the contrary, saddened by it, as can be proven by Holy Scripture. God points you out to the devil and says, >Look, you miserable creature, you who were unwilling to obey me, you whom I created with so many privileges and with whom I shared my glory; look at this simple Sister, who is so courageous that she makes no account of all the difficulties she'll have to face in order to obey me, nor of all the repugnances nature may suggest to her. Look, you miserable creature, and let this example also serve to confound you and add to your eternal punishment!=

ADon't we see in Job the pleasure God takes in His chosen souls and how He points them out to Satan to increase his shame? >Do you not see my servant Job,= He says to him, >how obedient he is to my law and how he wants to please me?=[3]

ANow, Sisters, if the demons suffer additional torment from this, so do lost souls. What

reproaches would God not address to a Sister from the Charity if, because she was unfaithful to her vocation, she was enduring the pains of Purgatory, and perhaps even those of hell, to satisfy the divine justice! May His Goodness not permit that! But if such a disaster did befall some of them, have no doubt that God would make known to those souls the good that you=re doing, Sisters. He says to them interiorly, >If you had not moved from there, if you had been faithful to your vocation, you would now be as pleasing to God as certain Sisters, who came long after you. They would be your daughters. Look at them, some here, some there; each glorifying God in the way of life established for her, this one in a parish, that one in the country, another in a hospital, yet another with the foundlings; and you, unfortunate woman, will be here for all eternity because you didn't follow the impulses God was giving you to do similar works! Ah! you unfortunate soul!= Your submission to the Will of God, Sisters, adds to the pain of these souls who suffer in punishment of their infidelities.

ADon't we see that those who have left your Company are languishing? They=re withering where they stand, Sisters, withering; I know that for a fact. God allows them to hear of the good which, by His mercy, is being done, and which they now see in another light than when they were listening to the temptation suggesting that they leave. That's why they make incredible efforts to return. They use the influence of Monsieur X, Madame X, Father X, and anyone else they can find among their acquaintances. They=re always secretly asking about what's going on at the Motherhouse and for news of Sisters they knew; they ask for the whereabouts of this Sister and that, and they hear that this one is in Nantes, another in Angers, another in Nanteuil, and then they say to themselves, >Alas! if I were still there, maybe I=d be in Angers, maybe in Nantes, maybe in Nanteuil.= And what you=re doing causes them remorse, which tyrannizes them and gnaws at them with displeasure. I know some who have neither property nor joy, and most of them are like that. Those who don't experience these sufferings are certainly in danger of being insensitive to the impulses of grace.

AThis should really encourage you, dear Sisters, to cherish the dispositions God has given you because, by the grace of God, I don't know if it has ever happened that a single one of you has refused to go where you were sent. No, I don't know of any. By the mercy of God, it has never come to my knowledge that a single one of you has been guilty of refusing to obey. What we=re saying is only by way of precaution and to point out to you how important it is for you to continue in the same dispositions God gave you from the beginning. And, as has been noted, it's to be feared that it would be the beginning of the ruin of your Company. And why? Because it was clear from the start, Sisters, that God wanted this of you, because He wants to be glorified by it and because the neighbor is helped by it.

AAnd how could you render to poor persons the service that, by the mercy of God, you do render them, if you never left a place! Who would go to those poor convicts? Who would nurse the sick in those villages? Who would visit those persons living in rooms and attics with no assistance? Doesn't the blessing given by God to these ministries make it clear how pleased He is with them? What would happen if a Sister should refuse to obey? By the grace of God, I don't think that has ever happened, but nothing can more surely draw down the wrath of God upon you.

AIf someone were to say, >But where's this place I'm going to? I don't know anyone; they'll laugh at me,= the same thing would happen to her as happened to Jonah. >Go to Nineveh,= the Most High said to him, >and tell the people to do penance, or in three days Nineveh will be destroyed.= Jonah began to think to himself, >There's a King in that place who may have me

maltreated; I won't be welcome if I go there to preach penance; I might even lose my life.= What does he do? He boards a ship to go elsewhere. Immediately the weather turns bad and a storm arises. To lighten the ship, the sailors decide to throw Jonah into the sea. A whale swallows him up, and holds him for three days, then spews him out alive. At that moment, Sisters, Jonah fully realized his disobedience, asked God's forgiveness for it with the greatest sorrow, and, filled with fire and faith, went off to preach in Nineveh.[4]

AYou can judge from the example of this prophet, Sisters, how angry God is with souls He has chosen to carry out His works, when they fail to obey. But who could hope for the grace He gave Jonah to get up after his fall? Alas, Sisters, don't expect it, for it's greatly to be feared that those as unfortunate as Jonah may, like him, fall to the bottom of the sea, into the belly of a whale--I mean, into sin and the incapacity to escape from it except by a remarkable miracle. And God doesn't do that every day. May the Goodness of God be pleased to preserve us from these faults!

AI know that people more than six hundred leagues away are asking for you, Sisters; I=ve had letters from them; yes, people more than six hundred leagues away are thinking of you; and if Queens[5] are requesting you there, I know other persons who are also asking for you overseas.[6] What a high opinion those Queens and those other persons must have of you, Sisters, to call for you from such a distance! This is another fresh obligation for you to work at your perfection and, above all, to acquire that detachment with which you must go.

AIt seems to me, however, that I see you already sufficiently convinced by all the aforesaid reasons, dear Sisters, in view of the most holy Will of God, in view of holy obedience, in view of the example Jesus Christ, who was obedient even to death on the Cross, has given you. He could have had millions of angels to defend Him against the rage of His enemies, He could have finished them on His own, since you see that He overturned them with a single word; yet, Sisters, He's unwilling to use this power, so greatly does He love to obey the most holy Will of His Father, and He's more content to die on the Cross to satisfy the good pleasure of God than if everything had come to His defense.

AI seem to read in your hearts the desire to imitate Him, Sisters. >But will I be going six hundred leagues away from here? Will I be going overseas?= I see clearly, dear Sisters, that you=re willing to go when obedience calls and that, even if you knew you=d never return, you wouldn't want to delay for even a moment. And I'm sure that not a single one of you hasn't already made this act of resignation in her heart. There are even some who have already done it more than six times. Yes, by the grace of God, I see all of you well disposed to do whatever it will please the Divine Goodness to ask of you, and I seem to hear you say, >Yes, my Lord Jesus Christ, with all the affection of my heart, with all the strength of my soul, I give myself entirely to You to live and to die in obedience as You willed to live and die by obeying, whether I'm sent to this place or that, or called back here to be sent somewhere else. It will be all the same to me, my God, whether for a short time or a long time, whether to live there or die there. I'm content with whatever You permit, and I won't worry about what could happen, provided it pleases you, my God, to grant me the grace of obeying all my life for love of You.=

AThe resolution all of you are now making, dear Sisters, I am also making, and I firmly hope that God in His goodness will grant me the grace to render to my Superiors the obedience I owe them. I firmly hope for this, please God. Wretched man that I am, I have good reason to regret having failed in it. *Eh bien*! blessed be God!

AWhat we have to do now, Sisters, is to find some means of making sure that these

weaknesses and thoughtlessness, which can come even to the most virtuous persons, don't prompt you to want to be separated from the Sister with whom God has permitted you to reside, on the pretext that the two of you don't get along very well, or that she's not exact in following her Rules, or that you want to ask to be changed because you=re not happy there (because of some Lady or some confessor!). *Mon Dieu*! Sisters, pay no attention to that, for it would trouble your peace of mind. Oh no! never listen to that!

ASo, Sisters, I won't try to find any means other than the ones you yourselves have given, because, by God's grace, I see none that are more effective. The first is to ask earnestly for the grace of God, for who could promise herself to advance a single step on the path of virtue, Sisters, if God doesn't place us on it first and guide us on the way? That's a truth guaranteed by the Gospel. >No one,= says Our Lord, >comes to me, if my Father does not draw him.=[7] Now, to obtain this grace from the Goodness of God, Sisters, it's only right that we should ask for it. So this will be one of the principal means you'll use; and, if you take my word, you won't miss a day without doing it. Ask for it earnestly; ask for it insistently; ask for it humbly; and, above all, ask for it with a great desire to obtain it, recognizing and admitting that without it you'll never take a step on the path of virtue. We delude and deceive ourselves if we think we can do anything on our own. Experience teaches us this only too well. We feel nature complaining, we feel a repugnance for this, an aversion for that, and sometimes a distaste for everything. Alas! if God didn't come to our rescue, what would we do! So, Sisters, I can't recommend this practice enough to you. But I hope that, since God has led you to understand how helpful it is, He'll give you the grace to adopt it.

AAnother means--which you=ve also mentioned--is to believe that we=re the ones at fault in the little confrontations that sometimes trouble our hearts. If you=re dissatisfied with your Sister, think about your own conduct: >But isn't it I who have given her reason for being in this mood?= Put yourself in her place and take a good look. If someone answered me as rudely as I answered her, wouldn't I resent it? Believe me, Sisters, God is the one who has led you to discover that this is one of the most effective means for preserving charity among yourselves because, if you consider your neighbor in the same light as you would like to be considered, you'll never think that she's wrong; on the contrary, she'll always seem to you to be right.

A >But what should be done when the person is so annoying that everything we do annoys her, Monsieur?= Sister, in the first place see whether or not you=ve given her cause to be annoyed, and whether you haven't given her reason to be more annoyed with you than you are with her, and say, >Alas! this Sister must be very good since Our Lord is trying her in this way; no doubt He wants to sanctify her by patience.= But don't ever say, >This Sister is annoying; she's so discontented! Nothing I can do pleases her,= because, first of all, you'll destroy charity between you, for there's nothing that cools it so much as contemptuous expressions.

AIn the places where you are, you won't produce the good results God wants you to bring about there, for, from the moment you no longer have the spirit of charity, there are no more question of good works. You'll lose your reputation of being Daughters of God, for charity is nothing other than God, and whoever says Daughters of Charity says daughters of God. What would the people who are expecting help from you say, and what would the Queens who are waiting for you say, if they no longer saw in you the spirit of God? So, preserve this spirit of God, Sisters, this spirit of charity and mutual support, which will always cause you to take the blame for everything and not put it on your Sister. Love one another with a heartfelt love and, since all of you are of only one mind, then be all of one heart as well. I'm not saying that you=re

to love one another with that sensual love that consists in I don't know what sort of satisfaction, Sisters; I don't mean with that evil love with which the wicked love the wicked, but with the love God wants us to have for one another and has its principle in Him.

AFeeling a certain natural repugnance at going far away or being with one person rather than another, Sisters, doesn't mean that you don't have the right disposition, provided it's only in your feeling but you don't consent to it and, as soon as you do feel it, that you go for the remedy, that is, to the foot of the Cross, to address your complaint lovingly to Our Lord, saying, >My God, You see how weak I am and how powerless to control myself and my passions. Please help me not to do anything contrary to Your Will; give me the strength, my God, not to give in.=

ABe very careful, Sisters, not to let your Sister see that you=re upset with her. Always live in peace. If, however, things don't calm down, Sisters, you can tell your troubles to your Superiors, but with submission, ready to do whatever they tell you, as coming from God. You can say to them, >I find it hard to go to such a place or to do such a thing; nevertheless, I'll still go, if you think fit.= And let me tell you, Sisters, allow yourselves to be guided. You'll experience the blessings God gives to submission. But if that should last for a month or two--even three or four--you shouldn't be upset by it, provided God and your Superiors are aware of it, for souls accept orders in diverse ways: some joyfully, others indifferently, and others with great difficulty. The ones who accept them with great joy are filled with the Spirit of God; they welcome difficulties and take their delight in them. These are gentle souls to whom God has given, together with His Spirit, fullness of peace, as a reward for the difficulties they=ve previously overcome. These souls, I repeat, dear Sisters, instead of experiencing any repugnance, are filled with consolation in the most trying circumstances, and rejoice to accept the most difficult proposals made to them. Lack of comfort, remoteness, any sort of companionship--and death itself, if it should come to them--are all the same to them in the sight of God because they are filled with God.

AOther souls also receive with pleasure the news that they are being sent to far off places, but from a motive quite contrary to that of the former, for it's because they'll be far removed from someone they dislike, or because they'll have greater freedom than at the Motherhouse, or because people will have a high opinion of them, talk about them and say, >That Sister has gone to such and such a place, to such and such a house. They must really appreciate her!= Let's be on our guard against this dangerous poison, Sisters, and strenuously reject these pernicious thoughts that would ruin all of us.

AFifteen or sixteen years ago a great nobleman of the court was condemned to be beheaded. A holy person was chosen to assist him to die. This person was Fr. de Condren,[8] General of the Oratorians, a man who had the spirit of God. He was told that this nobleman was the most resolute, the best prepared to die, the most generous, and the bravest man alive, and that he was going to his death as cheerfully as to battle. Now, this holy man who had vast experience and excellent judgment, was afraid that the nobleman was acting that way for the wrong reason, namely, vanity, so that he wouldn't appear to be a coward in his passage from this life, and to have people speak of his courage after his death. He went to see him and, finding him so determined, began to assail him with the fear of death. >Do you realize, Monsieur,= he said to him, >that you=re going to die in two hours and that you'll have to appear before God and give an account of the many souls you=ve sent to hell? Fifteen or twenty men, whom you=ve slain in duels, and most of whom died without confession, are crying out to God for justice. And how do you know whether you'll be eternally damned with them? It's God you=re dealing with, Monsieur; think carefully about that; very little time remains; you must spend it well.=

AThese words and a few others that this good priest addressed to the unfortunate nobleman gripped him with fear. He was disconcerted and no longer knew what to do. He was heartily sorry for the evil he had done. He feared the judgment of God, and when that holy man saw him in this state, he shored up his courage with the following words: >It's true that you can't be too sorry for the evil you=ve done, Monsieur, but I assure you on the part of God that, if you really and truly repent, if you accept death in satisfaction for your sins, they will be forgiven.= So, he was reassured and full of confidence. The good priest then made him acknowledge that his courage was due to vanity alone and a desire to acquire a reputation.

ANow, God forbid, Sisters, that you should act from such a motive! I hope that God in His goodness will preserve you from that. I entreat Him to do so with all my heart, and also to deign to give us the dispositions necessary for the accomplishment of His holy Will for our entire lives, in every place and with anyone whomsoever. I ask that, in His infinite mercy, He will deign to forgive all of us the faults we=ve committed against holy obedience and to accept the resolution we=re taking to live and die under obedience for love of Him. I make the same resolution for myself and, with the grace of God, I hope to be faithful to it, obeying my Superiors meticulously. This is the resolution you are now making, Sisters, and I pray with all my heart that God may graciously accept it. With this confidence, I will now pronounce the words of blessing on you. At the same time I'm pronouncing them, may God be pleased to send you the strength of His Spirit by the power of His word!

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

44. - OBEDIENCE

August 7, 1650

ASisters, the subject of this conference is obedience. The first point deals with the reasons we have for this obedience; the second, the conditions necessary for true obedience, and the third, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions. So that's the subject, Sisters: holy obedience; a great virtue and a great topic for us to discuss; a great, great virtue! Please tell us your thoughts on it, Sister.@

After the Sister had spoken, Most Honored Father said to her, ASo, Sister, you=re determined to acquire the virtue of obedience! That's very fine indeed! May God be ever blessed and praised!

AAnd you, Sister?@

AOn the first point, the reasons why we should have the virtue of obedience, I thought in the first place that it was to please God; second, to imitate His Son who gave us the example while He was on earth. And since He had no other intention than to please God, we must do the same in all our works.

AOn the second point, the conditions for true obedience, I thought that the first one was to obey of our own free will and not out of constraint; and simply, without asking why we are being ordered to do such or such a thing.

AOn the third point, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions, I thought it was necessary to obey humbly, without any argument, and perseveringly, without asking questions. I have resolved, therefore, to submit to whatever it pleases God to have my Superiors order me to do.@

Another Sister recalled the example of Jesus Christ in the matter of voluntary obedience and added that this virtue should be blind.

AAnd you, Sister,@ said our worthy Father, turning to another Sister, Aplease tell me why Daughters of Charity should work at acquiring the virtue of obedience.@

ABecause nuns have cloisters, Monsieur, but we don=t; and if obedience didn't restrain us, we=d be in danger of committing many faults.@

A*Mon Dieu*! that's well said! That's very well said, indeed! So, Sister, do you think obedience should restrain you as much as cloisters restrain nuns?@ The Sister answered that she did, adding that, even though we=re not enclosed, we=re no less obliged to be obedient than nuns.

AIn that way, Sisters, obedience serves you as walls. How beautiful that is! A Sister will nurse sick persons in a parish. If she were her own mistress, she=d have no problem going now to this place, now to another, to the home of a Lady she knows or to a relative, or of lingering longer than her work requires in places where she is called to minister. Holy obedience keeps her from all that; she goes simply where the work demands, and wastes no time in useless visits. Isn't that what you mean, Sister, when you say that nuns have cloisters but Daughters of Charity have only obedience? Do you think that a Daughter of Charity who observes obedience exactly does just as well as a nun in her cloister?@

The Sister said yes, and M. Vincent went on, AYes, Sisters, you can be certain of that. If there's anything beautiful to see, anything that's pleasing to God, and admirable in the eyes of angels and humans; if there's a phenomenon worthy of amazement, it's to see Sisters living on their own in a room, who seem, in the judgment of those who don't know them, to be doing as they please, but in reality are so submissive that it may be said that they never do their own will because they do nothing except by holy obedience. No, dear Sisters, you can rest assured that nuns, confined their entire lives within their cloisters, do no more than you, if you=re obedient, and that what you do by this virtue is so great that it would be hard to find anything greater.

AWhat means should you use to acquire this virtue of obedience, Sister?@ When the Sister had answered that we should obey Superiors as we would God, Most Honored Father continued, ASo then, Sister, you think that when a Sister says something to us it's God who is saying it to us through her?@

AYes,@ she replied.

AAnd if it's the Sister Servant who gives the order, and we find it hard to obey, thinking that it would be done better in some other way, should we refrain from obeying?@

ANo,@ said the Sister.

ABut if the Sister Servant is younger and a more recent arrival than you, wouldn't it be better to follow the knowledge and experience you have than to do what she advises?@ To this the Sister replied that she felt it was more meritorious to listen to the Sister Servant.

AYou=re quite right, Sister! and you need have no doubt about it; take my word that what God orders you by your Superiors for love of Him will never fail to be for His greater glory.

AAnd you, Sister, do you think it's necessary for a Daughter of Charity to be obedient?@

AYes, it is.@

AWhy do you think so, Sister?@

ABecause the Son of God has given us the example.@

AWhen did He do that, Sister?@

AWhen He came on earth.@

AAnd how long did He obey?@

AUntil His death.@

AYou said it well. Yes, He obeyed even to death, and to death on the Cross, which wasn't a common, ordinary form of death, but the most painful and ignominious of all. For what other reason do you think a Daughter of Charity should obey?@

ABecause God orders it.@

AThat's an excellent reason; God has ordered that we obey, and if anyone should do what God has ordered it's the Daughters of Charity.

To understand clearly the importance of obeying, Sisters, you have to consider that two kinds of merit are entailed in obeying. The first is the merit of the work you=re doing, which is good in itself; the second is the merit of the obedience with which you do the work. For example, you serve the sick, which is a good work and very meritorious in itself. If you weren't obliged to do it through obedience, you=d have only the merit of the work; if you serve them through obedience, you have double merit: that of the work and that of obedience. If possible, we should always desire to act through obedience. Imagine, Sisters, that for works done through obedience, the same holds true as for a picture that may be worth ten écus for what it is in itself, but because it's from the hand of a great master, such as Michelangelo, or some other highly-respected artist, its value doubles; and, instead of the ten écus it would be worth, it's now worth twenty. These works are also like the vestments used at Mass; you see beautiful linen, gleaming white, carefully folded, with a pleasing scent. That's lovely. But because this linen is to be used at Holy Mass, it's of far greater value. So, if we do a work that's good in itself we merit from the goodness of the work, but if we do it out of obedience, we have double merit. Actions indifferent in themselves, having no value of their own, are made meritorious by obedience. If a Sister knew the real meaning of obedience she=d never do anything until after she had asked the Sister Servant: >Sister, would you like me to do this?= I'm speaking not only of matters of importance but of others as well. The Sister Servant herself should never do anything until she has consulted her companion: >Sister, do you think it would be a good idea for us to do this?=

AThat's how you should act with one another, dear Sisters; and, by the mercy of God, I think you do; for, no doubt the Sister never undertakes anything without permission of the Sister Servant, and the latter is very careful never to order her Sister to do anything by saying, for instance, >Go there; do that.= *O Jésus*! don't do that, for that would be to speak like mistresses to their servants. But when she has something to ask, she should say, >Sister, would you kindly do this?= Never any categorical command. Please remember that, Sisters, and speak to one another only gently and graciously.

ACan you tell us, Sister, why Daughters of Charity should practice obedience?@ The Sister replied that a Community couldn't subsist without obedience. AWhat a good reason, Sisters! A Community couldn't subsist if obedience weren't observed in it, says our Sister. How true that is! Alas! what desolation would there be? You can't imagine. Each one would start giving orders, and not a single one would take the trouble to obey. To understand this, picture to yourself what would happen to a body whose arms and feet, the members best fitted for action, were unwilling to be attached to it. Nothing would be more ridiculous; they=d leave the body crippled, and they themselves would perhaps hasten their own decay because, detached from the body, they=d be fit for nothing but to be buried in the ground. It would be the same for a Community where obedience wouldn't be observed. The Superioress who lacked the virtue of obedience to the point or in the manner required, and the Sisters who wouldn't practice it, would dismember one another. Good-bye to the poor Community where there's no obedience; nothing can be maintained. That's why our Sister was perfectly correct--or rather truly inspired--because,

without doubt, it was God who has suggested to you what you are saying.

AAnd for what further reason do you think it's well to obey, Sister?@

ATo imitate the Son of God.@

ATo what point did He obey, Sister?@

AUnto death.@

ASo, Sister, you think that those who wish to follow Him should obey unto death?@

AYes, Father.@

AFor young people, there's nothing better; but can't an older Sister be dispensed from obedience? Isn't it enough that she obeyed when she was a Sister companion? Now that she's a Sister Servant, is she still subject to it?@

AYes, she is,@ replied the Sister.

AAnd shouldn't an older Sister who finds herself living with someone younger and less experienced than herself think that she should be the Sister Servant?@ The answer was in the negative, and Most Honored Father went on, AOh no, dear Sisters! just because you=re old don't think that it's ever permissible to make any claims. Never, Sisters, never; please put that out of your minds; never claim anything on account of seniority. *Quoi*! because you=re older and have been in the Company a long time; because you know more about what should be done in hospitals, parishes, and in the country, you should be dispensed from holy obedience and from a more exact observance of the virtues? No, Sisters! that would be an abuse. Instead of giving greater example of virtue to others, the older Sisters would be a source of disedification.

ATell me, Sister, do you think a Sister should be just as obedient in sickness as in health? Yes, she should, Sisters; and don't think there's any time when she may be dispensed from obeying. And should she obey the physician?@

AYes,@ said the Sister.

AYes, Sister, she must obey the physician, and in everything, not picking and choosing among the remedies prescribed for her, or taking those she likes and refusing those she finds repugnant. But if the Sister Servant is ill and another Sister tells her how she should care for herself, does she have to obey, if she herself judges it advisable to act differently? I remember meeting a Counselor, who never did anything without consulting his footman. If he wanted to go somewhere, he=d call him and say, >Come here, brother; do you think we should go to such a place or do such a thing?= Sometimes the young man didn't know what to reply and would say: >I don't know, Monsieur,= [but the other would say,] >I want you to answer me yes or no.= Then the footman would give his opinion, and the master would follow it. I have no doubt that this man was doing the Will of God by doing the will of his footman for the love of God, and he had the merit of obedience to the divine virtue that divinizes people. It's a light that sheds its brightness on the souls disposed to receive it and dazzles by its splendor the eyes of those who see it and who begin immediately to admire its beauty.

AIf you give yourselves once and for all to the practice of this virtue, Sisters, you'll be more resplendent than the sun of suns; the same will hold true of your Company as of pictures of the saints. Haven't you sometimes seen pictures in which saints are represented in a brilliant light, like sunbeams. That's delightful, and even before you stop to consider what this is, you=ve already said to yourself >that's a saint= because you=ve seen the light radiating from the person. In the same way, Sisters, when the virtue of obedience is apparent in each of you, it will immediately cause those who see you to say that you=re servants of God, so true is it that virtue

comes to the fore wherever it is. And not only Christians but even pagans thought it so beautiful that they were quite enchanted with it and made greater efforts to acquire it than we might do to acquire the Christian virtues (it was the only moral virtue they knew of at the time). Let's not have less admiration for it than the pagans did. So, dear Sisters, let's give ourselves to God, I say, not tomorrow but beginning right now, from this very moment--and I don't mean only you, but I'm speaking for myself because I have as much or even greater need of it than you. So let's give ourselves, I repeat, with all our heart, to work earnestly to acquire this beautiful, amiable virtue, so well loved by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

AYou made a very good remark, Sister, in saying that a Community would go to rack and ruin without obedience. Nothing is more true, and we=ve already said so just now. Moreover, there isn't a single well-regulated Community in which it isn't strictly observed. This applies not only to religious Communities but also to the army. Should a captain command a soldier to be the first to mount the breach, to act as a lookout over a passage where he runs a great risk of encountering the enemy and of being the weaker party, he'll never refuse. No matter what man in his company the captain orders to do this, he'll be obeyed immediately. No soldier has yet been known to refuse, although frequently the danger may have been obvious. No, not a single one has ever refused. That's admirable. I sometimes ask them, >But when you see inevitable danger, don't you give some good reasons for not going?= >Oh no, Monsieur!= they tell me, >that has never happened.= If disobedience were to creep into the army, then good-bye to all the rest of order in warfare; it would no longer exist. The same would happen to Companies committed to God's service, Sisters; if obedience is absent, then good-bye to all order; that's the end of it.

ANow, tell me, Sister, what is the virtue of obedience?@

AIt's doing what we=re ordered to do.@

AIt certainly is that, Sister, but when you=re asked what is the virtue of obedience, you should say that it's a virtue by which we submit our judgment and will to the judgment and will of our Superior to approve and carry out whatever he may think fitting to order us to do, without finding any fault in it. If a feast day occurs, which a Sister in a parish did not foresee, may she go to Communion, even though she hasn't asked permission?@ The Sister didn't know what to reply. AOh no, Sister! she mustn't do it; you must never receive Communion without permission.

AA Sister obeys willingly, but only when given orders by Mademoiselle or someone she likes but not by her Sister Servant; is she obedient, Sister? Oh no, definitely not, because true obedience makes no exception of persons.

AAnd would the Sister who obeys in something that pleases her, but not in something that doesn=t, have the virtue of obedience? No, she wouldn't be obeying either and would have no merit. But if, in order not to contradict her Superioress or to fail in the respect due to her, a Sister showed that she was ready to do what was asked of her but didn't do it, would she be disobeying? Yes, dear Sisters, she=d be disobedient, and in a way very harmful to the Company, letting it be seen that she prefers her own judgment to that of the Superioress. And supposing the Superioress ordered something that might be a sin, should she do it? No, she shouldn=t, Sister, because our Superiors can't oblige us to do anything sinful.

ASupposing what she ordered was contrary to the Rule, what should be done?@

AI think it should be pointed out to her, Monsieur, and, if she persisted, her order should be carried out.@

AThat's very well thought out, Sister, for sometimes Superiors alter certain circumstances for

good reasons, without, however, changing the matter completely; in such a case, because of the zeal each of you should have for the observance of Rule, it's a good idea to point out humbly and quite simply that the order seems contrary to the Rule on that point. Then, it's up to the Superioress to see if the thing is necessary. We must be extremely cautious on this point. There are two kinds of obedience: one to the Rules and the other to Superiors. Obedience to the Rule should always take first place and be preferred; if Superiors were to give an order directly contrary to the Rules, they shouldn't be obeyed and would be blameworthy. Each of you must be exact to this obedience and not allow any delay. If the bell rings for an exercise, leave everything. Our progress in the spiritual life depends on this obedience to Rule. Obedience to Superiors must be so faithful and entire that, if we knew for certain that, by doing the contrary of what they said, things would go better and they themselves wouldn't disapprove, such thoughts should still be rejected; they=re diabolical and are prompted by the spirit of pride and presumption.

ASo, Sister, how many kinds of obedience are there?@

AThere are two; one to the Rules and the other to Superiors.@

AWell now, Sister, a Sister who goes to Mass after asking permission has double merit: the merit of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass--the most excellent work in Christendom--and that of obedience, habitual obedience to the Rule that ordains it, and actual obedience to the Superioress of whom she has asked the permission.

AAnd whom does a Sister obey when she kneels down before leaving the house?@

AShe obeys the Rule.@

AAnd if she didn't obey it, would she sin?@

ANo, Monsieur, but she=d deprive herself of the merit of obedience.@

ASo then, Sister, you think it's meritorious to obey?@

AYes, I do, Monsieur.@

AYes, it is, Sisters, and it's such that if you and I appreciated it properly we=d never, in the entire course of our lives, want to perform any action, however unimportant it might seem, except from obedience. You have this in your power, Sisters. And what a degree of virtue you can attain if you devote yourselves wholeheartedly to practice it! I tell you, Sisters, as long as the Company continues in the way God has given it the grace to begin, no nun on earth will do better than you. Each and every one of you can give more glory to God and greater service to your neighbor and work harder at your own perfection than any nun on earth.

APlease tell us the thoughts with which God graciously inspired you, Sister.@

AThe first reason I saw is that, when we enter the Company, we place ourselves voluntarily under the guidance of a Superioress; from then on we=re obliged to live under obedience. A second reason is that it's impossible to remain in the Company without this virtue; we=d gradually begin to grow lax in our exercises, find the orders of our Superiors wearisome, and be a source of scandal to all our Sisters. Superiors would then be forced to send us away, or we ourselves would be prompted to withdraw, for we=d no longer be able to endure our own failings, imagining that everyone was watching us, that we were a burden to them, and a thousand similar thoughts. In the end we=d have to give up everything. Another reason is that, since we have no other model in the Company than the Son of God, we=re obliged to work at acquiring the virtues that were most resplendent in His life, and obedience holds the first place among all of them because He began to obey from the time of His Incarnation until His death on the Cross.

AOn the second point, the conditions of true obedience, I thought that it must be humble, patient, prompt, joyous, and persevering and that we should have the same will and judgment as those who give us orders, and equally towards all of them, without considering to whom we=re submitting, recognizing the right of everyone to command us.

AOn the third point, the means of acquiring this virtue with all its conditions, the first is to ask it often of God; the second, always to see God in the person of those to whom we=re subject; the third, to set ourselves the task of acquiring this virtue until God gives us the grace to do so; to make frequent interior acts of submission of our judgment and will and, beginning in the morning, to foresee occasions of doing so; to make our particular examination of conscience on it and to impose some penance on ourselves when we fail; and to renew our resolutions with confidence in God. I recognized how greatly I need this virtue. That's why I resolved, with the grace of God, to use these means. Nevertheless, I=ve been so remiss that, since the day I made that resolution, I failed again in obedience on an occasion that presented itself. For this I very humbly ask pardon of you, Father, and of Mademoiselle and all our Sisters.@

AGet up, Sister, Get up. Blessed be God and blessed be the thoughts He has given you and the resolutions He has led you to make! You said very rightly, Sister, that it would be impossible to remain in the Company without obedience. That has already been mentioned several times, but it seems to me that we can't ponder it enough.

AAnd you, Sister, please tell us what was the most resplendent virtue in the Son of God.@

AI think it was obedience, Father.@

AYes, Sister, holy obedience. He had all the virtues to a sovereign degree, but He loved obedience above all.

AWhom should we obey, Sister? Whom should Daughters of Charity obey?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that they should obey God first of all, then their Rules, Superiors, and the Lady Officers in the parishes where they are.@

AThat's well stated. You see, Sisters, the Ladies have to be obeyed in whatever concerns the service of the sick, provided they don't tell you to do anything contrary to your Rules. You owe them that, with all respect and submission. They=re the ones who employ you and give you the means of rendering the service you render to God. If they ask you to do something forbidden by your Rules, then you must excuse yourselves frankly and in such a way as not to vex them; I'm sure they won't be annoyed, if you speak to them humbly and gently.

AAnd when a parish Sister wants to go to Communion but doesn't have permission, what should she do, Sister?@

AI think she must refrain from going, as has been said, Father.@

AYes, Sister, never go to Communion without permission. No doubt, when you live far away, you can't come to ask for it each time, but you have to get instructions beforehand for the whole time you=re away. If some feast of special devotion occurs, on which you know the Community doesn't receive Communion, then you mustn't do so either. With us, if a priest recited an Office different from the one ordered by the Church, that would be wrong. If a person is attached to reciting the Office of a certain saint, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Holy Cross, etc., it doesn't matter, he must submit to what the Church orders and not change it in any way whatsoever. Neither is it allowed to add something to the Office. I'm telling you this, Sisters, to help you to understand how important it is always to conform to what the Community is doing.

AThere would be nothing more beautiful in the world, Sister, than the Company of the Daughters of Charity, if it were so uniform that, no matter where it was established, nothing

would be done that was not in conformity with what is practiced in this house, and obedience was in effect everywhere, with the Sister Servant being the first to obey, to ask advice, and to submit to others. No, take my word for it, Sisters, I don't think there's anything in the world more beautiful and more edifying.

AAnd you, Sister, will you tell us some of your thoughts?@

AOn the first point, Father, I thought that the primary reason for acquiring the virtue of obedience is that the first man lost all the other virtues by the sin of disobedience, and that all Christians are obliged to practice this virtue in order to be saved. This is clear from the fact that God has given us commandments which must be obeyed if we don't want to be damned. The second reason is that Our Lord has given us the example, for He came on earth, accomplished our redemption, and appeased the anger of God by His obedience. The third is that, besides the obedience God wills from all Christians, He asks for a more definite, particular obedience from those He has called to serve Him, without which we couldn't be saved. A fourth is that, in our state of life, we could have no interior peace without obedience.@

AOur Sister has mentioned two powerful reasons, Sisters; and I'm going to repeat them so that they'll remain in your minds. One is that the Son of God appeased the wrath of God His Father by obedience, and by this means accomplished the work of our salvation. *Mon Dieu*! that's beautiful, and who can refuse to obey if she reflects on these truths? The other compelling reason, in addition to the ones our Sister gave, is that a Sister who wasn't obedient wouldn't have interior peace. No, Sisters, she=d never have it; there's never peace where there's no obedience, so don't expect it; there's continual unrest, making people anxious and unbearable to themselves. Please continue, Sister.@

AOn the second point, the principal condition necessary for true obedience is submission of the judgment and the will; the second is perseverance, in imitation of the Son of God, who was obedient unto death on the Cross. The first means of acquiring this virtue is to ask it earnestly from Jesus Christ--the kind He himself had, both in regard to God His Father in all that concerned our salvation, and His holy Mother and Saint Joseph in what concerned the conduct of His life while He was subject to them. The second means is to practice it on all occasions that arise, for nothing makes it easier than to make frequent acts of it.@

AThat's the only way, Sisters: to ask Jesus Christ for this virtue. That's its source. Never, never, Sisters, will you obtain obedience except in that way. But what do you mean by *acts*, Sister? A little while ago someone said that we should make interior acts. Is that what you mean, or do you want to speak of the works themselves?@ The Sister replied that interior acts were the desire to practice the virtue when we have the opportunity, and that by *acts* she meant obeying when the occasion arose, neglecting no opportunity of doing so.

Most Honored Father questioned another Sister, who repeated what others had said. Then he questioned Mademoiselle, who replied, AThe first reason that came to my mind is that, in creating the world, God subjected all creatures to obedience. It seems, therefore, that only rational creatures have contravened this, which really obliges us to love and practice the virtue of obedience.

AAnother reason is that disobedience has always been so displeasing to God that, since it was man who introduced it, it was necessary for one of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity to become man to make amends for the fault--not only to let us see by His acts of obedience how reasonable it is for us to obey, but also that our imperfect acts of obedience, by being united to those of the Son of God, may have the merit of His. This is a strong reason to acquire and

practice the virtue of obedience.

AA third reason is that, without obedience, there would be continual disorder in every family, especially in Communities, and even greater among the Daughters of Charity because of the freedom their custom gives them to go to various places, and because of the interior and exterior disturbance disobedience would cause them.

AOne of the means that I thought could help me to have the virtue of obedience in the way God asks it is, in my opinion, to have a high regard for it, often calling to mind the obedience of the Son of God in things that are painful and difficult for us, reflecting that He willed to observe it unto death to serve as an example and encouragement to us.

AAnother means I hope to make use of is to be on the alert for opportunities of practicing obedience. If I'm not fortunate enough to have them often in my daily actions, I thought that, when I give orders or advice to the persons to whom I'm obligated to do so by my office, it's because I have been commanded to do so by the Will of God expressed to me by my Superiors.

AAs for matters of minor importance, I'll try, with the help of God's grace, to defer and acquiesce more humbly to those who demand something of me, provided I can do so without offending God. And because obedience may be observed in various ways, it seemed to me that, if it is to be in the way God asks of me, it was imperative to obey with great simplicity and humility.

ASecond, we must obey those who have a right to give us orders, without making any distinction of persons, as if it were God commanding us, since it's for love of Him that we must obey and in order to do His holy Will.

AA third condition of true obedience is to do nothing to influence our Superiors to tell us to do what we desire, but to try to have them order us what they know God wants of us.

AIn the fourth place, I think obedience must be prompt and unquestioning, with submission of our own judgment and fidelity to the practice of what we=re ordered to do. To my mind, it will be a great help to us if we accustom ourselves not to be opinionated and to yield to all sorts of persons, even in trifling matters.

AI=ve been deeply ashamed, seeing how often I=ve failed in all those practices through my arrogance and obstinacy. I'm sorry for this and ask pardon of all my Sisters who may have remarked it.@

AWell, dear Sisters, it seems to me that you=re all filled with respect for this virtue; you=re convinced that your Company, which is so pleasing to God for what it does and the ministries to which it devotes itself, will also receive an increase of merit that cannot be imagined, if it does them virtuously and for the love of holy obedience. That's why I think all of you are filled with the desire to devote yourselves to it and to give yourselves now to God never to do anything contrary to it. With my whole heart I bless and praise His Divine Goodness for all the inspirations He has given you: the reasons why it's just and necessary to obey, the conditions that must accompany true obedience, and the appropriate means and resolutions for putting it into practice. I entreat Our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all graces are given to us, to obtain for us from the Eternal Father an obedience like He himself had, to make up by the infinite merits of His obedience for the deficiencies that are in ours, to be pleased that all of you here present may be faithful and exact in carrying out the inspirations He'll send you by His Holy Spirit, to make the grace He has given you fruitful, to communicate it through you to our absent Sisters, and through you and them to those who come after you, so that, when they hear of the obedience that was practiced in the Company, they may feel bound to continue it. I ask this of my Lord Jesus

Christ, and I entreat it of the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name I, although a miserable sinner, supported by its infinite mercy, shall not refrain from pronouncing the words of blessing. A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

45. - TO SOME SISTERS BEING SENT TO THE COUNTRY

October 22, 1650

ADear Sisters, one of the principal virtues you must possess is humility; yes, Sisters, maintain great humility. Consider yourselves the least of everyone; remember that you=re servants of the poor; regard them as your masters and serve them with great gentleness and humility.

AThe second thing you must have, Sisters, is charity--great charity with everyone.

AThe third thing, dear Sisters--and I recommend it above all--is mutual support; yes, Sisters, great support. Never do anything to displease one another, Sisters, never; and for that purpose, acquiesce to one another and ask each another's advice. The Sister Servant must consult her Sister: >Shall we go there, Sister? Shall we do that?= And if the Sister replies, >I think that would be a good idea, Sister,= then do it. >But,= you'll say to me, >must the Sister Servant consult and give in to her Sister?= Yes, she certainly must; yes, she has to do it; she must yield in everything and be the most humble, but she has to hold her own if her Sister should want to do anything contrary to God and the Rules; she must stand fast. The Sister Servant must also do nothing without informing her Sister, and have great respect for her.

ASo bear with one another, dear Sisters, when any slight misunderstandings arise among you--for they will arise. Give yourselves to God for that intention, beginning right now, for there's no one who doesn't commit some fault. What seems to us to be a fault in our Sister may not always be one. Sometimes we=re the ones who aren't in the right mood to agree with what our Sister is doing; it's not what we expected, and that annoys us. Let's not be surprised at finding it hard to bear with others, Sisters, since at times we can't stand ourselves. What pleases us today displeases us tomorrow; we=re never in the same state; we want something and then we don't want it. We=re disagreeable to ourselves. If something happens to annoy you, Sisters, excuse one another and think, >It's because I'm not in a good mood. It's not that my Sister has done anything wrong; I'm the one who isn't humble and can't even stand myself.= Lastly, Sisters, if you=ve given one another any cause for displeasure, ask forgiveness for it as soon as possible, and both of you kneel down and say, >*Mon Dieu*! Sister, I=ve given you some reason for being displeased; I ask your pardon for it.= The other Sister should reply, >Sister, I'm the one who asks yours.= By so doing, you'll preserve union among you. Please don't fail in this, Sisters.

ASo, then, take great care to instruct those poor people, Sisters; teach them how to die well. What a consolation to help those good people get to heaven! Yes indeed, you'll be leading them to heaven. As for your pupils, you'll be teaching them to serve God well. You'll do great things if you=re faithful to God, Sisters. In connection with this, I have to tell you what dear Mme Goussault, who was a great servant of God (she was a saint, Sisters; she loved your Company dearly), said to me the night before she died: >Monsieur, I=ve been very much absorbed with God tonight, and I=ve seen a Daughter of Charity before Him. What great things they'll do, Monsieur!= How happy you'll be, Sisters, if God is glorified by your actions. Yes indeed, He'll be glorified by them if you work for love of Him.

ADon't waste your time ingratiating yourselves with persons of the upper class, paying them compliments and acting like Ladies of the court. *O mon Dieu*! no, no, don't do that; all would be lost, Sisters. *O mon Dieu*! avoid that carefully.

So, you'll be going to visit certain persons, dear Sisters, and if you=re taken to see the Bishop of the area, ask for his blessing; tell him you want to live entirely under obedience to him, that you give yourselves entirely to him for the service of the poor, and that you=ve been sent for that purpose. If he asks you who you are and whether you=re nuns, tell him that you=re not, by the grace of God--not that you don't have a high opinion of nuns, but that, if you were nuns, you=d have to be enclosed; consequently, you=d have to say good-bye to the service of the poor. Tell him that you=re poor Daughters of Charity, who have given yourselves to God for the service of the poor, that it's permitted for you to withdraw, and that you may also be dismissed.

AIf he asks you, >Do you make religious vows?= tell him, >Oh no, Monsieur! we give ourselves to God to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience, some of us forever, and others for a year.=

ALastly, dear Sisters, give yourselves totally to God to do well what you=re going to do. Ask Him for the spirit of His Son so that you may be able to perform all your actions as He did His, Sisters, because you have the happiness of imitating the life that the Son of God led with His Apostles on earth. I ask Him, Sisters, to be pleased to fill you with His spirit and to give you the graces necessary for you to be true Daughters of Charity. This is what I beseech Him to do with all my heart and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

Afterward, a Sister Servant asked, AFather, I beg you to order my Sister to remind me of my faults whenever I fail.@

AYes, Sister, willingly, but we shouldn't admonish someone on every occasion because what we think is a fault may perhaps not be one; we should make our prayer on this beforehand and ask ourselves, >Is what my Sister has done a serious fault?= And if we see that it isn=t, then say nothing. It's not important; it gives bad example to no one; so, ignore it. But, if God lets us see in prayer that it's a serious fault, then attention must be called to it. However, do you know how this must be done? You should kneel down and say, >Sister, I think you=re willing to allow me to remind you of this fault so that you'll be careful about it.= That's how you should act, dear Sisters. I recommend myself to your prayers.@

46. - THE VIRTUES OF SISTERS ANNE DE GENNES, MARIE LULLEN,<R>MARGUERITE BOSSU, AND CÉCILE DELAÎTRE[1]

December 9[2]

The first of our Sisters mentioned at this conference was Sister Anne de Gennes. She was of noble birth and left everything to give herself to God in the Company of the poor Daughters of Charity, in which she had the happiness to persevere until death. One of our Sisters who had lived with her said that Sister de Gennes was chagrined whenever anyone spoke to her of her noble birth, that it mortified her, and she couldn't endure it.

AAh! Sisters,@ said M. Vincent, Awhat virtue not to seek esteem and not to want people to speak of her family! That good Sister hid what others parade and humbled herself for what would have given others reason to elevate themselves. Is there anyone here who lived with Sister Anne?@

AYes, Father,@ replied one of the Sisters, AI lived with her for a short time.@

AWell, Sister, what virtues did you remark?@

AShe was very patient in her sufferings, Father, never complaining, never growing weary of suffering. She sometimes feared, however, that she was a burden and was upset because she was unable to work like the others. I also noticed that Sister was very humble: she always thought

that what she did was worthless and that what others did was much better.@

AIt's all right to feel upset at not being able to work,@ replied M. Vincent, Abut it's a temptation, Sisters, to think you=re a burden to others and to be troubled in such circumstances. You must be resigned to God's Will with regard to the illnesses He sends you, and believe that your Sisters are happy to practice charity in the services they render you.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI noticed that Sister Anne often shared with her Sisters the thoughts God had given her in prayer. She took great care that the sick whom she was nursing received the sacraments in due time. She never left a patient's room without saying something edifiying. She served poor persons as she would have served Our Lord, and used to say that she felt greater pleasure when she had been to see some poor persons than if she had been visited by her parents.@

AAh! Sisters,@ said M. Vincent, Awhat virtue! What a good Sister! To prefer visiting persons who were poor to seeing her own parents, and always seeing Jesus Christ in them! May God be forever blessed for that, Sisters! This should stir up in us the desire to give ourselves in earnest to Our Lord to imitate the virtues noted in this dear Sister, who, as we=ve just heard, was humble, patient, and charitable. Let's imitate above all her humility, desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing, and let's reflect that, if we make a show of the little good we do, we'll lose all the merit of it before God.

AMademoiselle, did you observe anything?@

AFather, I noted that Sister Anne had a great love of her vocation, courageously overcoming all the difficulties she encountered in it, which were far greater in her case than in that of others because her health was very delicate. Nevertheless, she didn't complain, and I never heard her say that she was unable to do what she was told. Her love for her vocation was also apparent in her last illness, for she asked insistently to be taken to the Motherhouse because she wanted to die there. She showed great patience in her sufferings and, when she was on her deathbed and someone said to her, >You=re really in a lot of pain,= she answered, >What I'm suffering is nothing in comparison with what Our Lord suffered for me.= She was submissive and obedient to the end, for, a moment before she died, the Sister infirmarian urged her to take something, although she felt a great repugnance because of the violent pains in her stomach which were brought on by anything she ate or drank. She took it nevertheless, showing that she was doing it through obedience; and she died shortly afterward.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, Athere's every reason to believe that she's with God. Let's see now what was remarked in Sister Marie Lullen, who was a native of Le Mans. Those of you who lived with her can tell us quite simply anything edifying you saw in her conduct.@

AFather,@ said a Sister, AI noticed that this dear Sister was very kind to the little children whom it was her duty to instruct. While she was in Nanterre, where I knew her before I had the happiness of being in the Company, I sometimes saw her kiss their feet, saying that she liked to think she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus.@

ABlessed be God,@ said M. Vincent. AThis good Sister had good reason to believe she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus. How pleasing He found such simplicity!@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Aone day I met Sister Marie when she was taking the children to Mass, and I admired her charity to a poor man she met on the way. She spoke to him of God, and since he had not heard Mass and didn't seem to want to go, she chided him so much that she persuaded him to go.@

AI noticed that she was humble,@ remarked another Sister, Aand seemed content when she

was rebuked. One day someone mortified her a little. Noticing that she seemed pleased, I expressed my surprise to her. >Sister,= she replied, >I must to abase myself so that Jesus may live in me.= @

AOh! what a beautiful remark,@ said M. Vincent, >I must abase myself!= And she rejoiced when she was reproached; may God be blessed and glorified! I'm not surprised that the Pastor of Nanterre has praised her so highly--although he's not very free with his compliments. But it seems that this dear Daughter had a virtue above the common run of people.@

AI knew Sister Marie Lullen while she was still in Le Mans, before she came here,@ added another Sister, Aand I remember that she and another young woman set aside their secular clothing and wore grey dresses; this led to their being ridiculed and mocked by those who disapproved of that change. They began to serve poor persons in the Le Mans hospital. They established great order in that house, where, until then, not much order had existed. Many people found fault with this, and they were really persecuted because of it, but they endured it courageously. In the end, desiring to give herself entirely to God, our good Sister decided to leave her family, which was very well off and in which she could have had every satisfaction, but her love of God caused her to leave everything courageously to come to our Community here in Paris.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, AGod doubtless had great plans for this Sister. Don't you think there's something in that, M. Portail? As for myself, I'm delighted with what has just been said. I never have greater consolation than when I hear an account of the virtues of our Sisters because it's clearly the work of God. May He be forever blessed for it!

AIf anyone noticed something else, let her mention it, for you see, Sisters, God's glory is made manifest by speaking of the virtues of our Sisters. He gave them these virtues to sanctify them, and He also wants us to profit from them by following their example. Mademoiselle, will you tell us what you know?@

AFather, this good Sister belonged totally to Our Lord, who had chosen her. She was a privileged soul. She had a special love for the practice of the hidden virtues and was very humble. I also remarked her conduct and submission when she was ill, taking the little things presented to her without showing any repugnance, and she expressed no annoyance when she wasn't given what she requested.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, Athat's how you should act when you=re ill, and not say, >This medicine isn't prepared properly; I can't take it.= To speak like that and to express your likes and dislikes is a sign of great imperfection. If someone takes pleasure in eating and drinking or looks for tasty foods, she must be on the watch against that, for such persons are scarcely ever virtuous. How guilty you=d be, Sisters, if you didn't profit from the good example of our Sisters, about whom such beautiful things have just been said!

AThat brings us to the third Sister of whom we have to speak. Who lived with Sister Marguerite Bossu?@

AI was with her for a short time,@ replied a Sister. AI noticed that she had a great love of the poor and also that, when I reproached her for something, she took it well and made no excuses.@

AShe was also very quiet and gentle,@ added M. Vincent. AWould you like to tell us anything about her, Mademoiselle?@

AFather, I recognized in her a great love of her vocation, for she surmounted the difficulties raised by her parents, who were very reluctant to allow her to come here; but she left them

courageously, and when she was admitted, she was so overjoyed that all the wealth in the world couldn't have made her want to leave the Community. She was in it only a year, but her fervor made her worthy of receiving her wages, like the workers who came at the eleventh hour and received as much as those who had labored all day long. In the same way, I think Our Lord was as pleased with the service this good Sister rendered Him than if she had served Him for many years because she did, in fact, have the desire to serve and honor Him all her life, however long it might have been. Sister Marguerite was very gentle and did everything she was told, without ever finding fault with it. She was very obedient and had a great love of the Community. She clearly demonstrated this when she became ill and, being told by the Sister with whom she was on mission that she should return to the Motherhouse, got up immediately and manifested the greatest pleasure at coming here, even though she was very sick.@

AWhat a fine Sister!@ said M. Vincent, Awhat a good thing it is to love to come to the Motherhouse! She showed clearly that she loved only God, since she was so detached from everything. She made no difficulty about leaving the house where she was happy, in order to do the Will of God. That's how you should act, Sisters, and never seek any pretext to dispense you from doing what you=re told.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI remarked that Sister Marguerite was very zealous to learn what we=re supposed to know and was also very discreet in what she said; she was unwilling to speak one unnecessary word, especially during the time of silence. It made me ashamed to see her virtue and to be so far removed from it myself. She always spoke about edifying things, especially the happiness of her vocation.@

ABlessed be God forever! What excellent practices! Aren't you touched at hearing this account of so many beautiful virtues, M. Portail?@

AWe still have to share our thoughts on the virtues remarked in Sister Delaître. Who lived with her?@

AFather,@ said Mademoiselle, Athis dear Sister never left the Motherhouse. She was here only four months. Her ministry was to serve the poor in Saint-Laurent parish.@

AWell, what virtues did you note in her, Mademoiselle?@

AI noted great gentleness; she was very attentive to the sick, but wasn't hasty nor anxious about it. She was active and hard-working, and looked for no notice for the work she was doing. She was very much inclined to what was good and the desire to improve, very forbearing with her Sisters, and very obedient to her Superiors. Her only regret was not having served the poor for very long.@

AWhat a good Sister! Although young in the Company, she was mature in virtue. In the short time she was in it, she accomplished what someone else might have done in six or even ten or twelve years. What a happiness, Sisters, to live among plants that bear such fruit! But also what a shame to see ourselves still vain, still seeking our own satisfaction. If there should be any among you who might desire to be seen, to be known, and to look for notice, if there should be any, I repeat, she should humble herself before God and say, >O my God, what shall I say? What shall I do? What shall I answer on Judgment Day, when I'll be reproached for having lived with the spouses of Jesus Christ, with Sisters filled with virtue, and didn't follow their example!= What a misfortune if there were any who might seek the appreciation of creatures or want to be commended! Nothing further would be needed to draw down the curse of God on the entire Company! I=d like to think that all of you are disposed to belong to God in real earnest. Don't you promise me, Sisters, to determine to work at your perfection and no longer have any high

opinion of yourself? For as soon as someone has a high opinion of herself, she wanders away from God. So, make up your mind, Sisters, to renounce your own will in order to no longer will anything but the accomplishment in you of the holy Will of God.@

AYes, Father,@ responded all the Sisters, Athat's our earnest desire.@

AI hope so, with the help of God's grace,@ replied M. Vincent, Aand, on His behalf, I will now pronounce the words of blessing, asking Him at the same time I am saying them, to fill our hearts--mine as well as yours--with the desire to acquire the virtues of which we=ve heard the account.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

47. - CONFESSION

March 5, 1651

AThe topic of this conference is confession, dear Sisters. It's divided into three points. The first deals with the reasons obliging Daughters of Charity to know how to make a good confession; second, the faults they may commit in confession, and third, the means of making a good confession. This is an important subject, Sisters; and, if we don't make good confessions, we=re in danger of often committing sacrileges.

APlease tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AOn the first point, Monsieur, I thought that one of the reasons obliging us to know how to make a good confession is that we can't teach the sick how to make a good confession, if, in the first place, we don't know how to do it ourselves. Another reason is that this sacrament is like a second Baptism, in so far as it restores us to grace. This is what obliges us to make a very careful preparation for it. The faults that may be committed are: not having the purity of intention of going simply to place ourselves in the state of pleasing God and seeking too much of our own satisfaction. The means of making a good confession are deep humility and the thought of the enormity of sin, etc.@

AThat's good, Sister. God bless you! And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.@

AIt seems to me, Father, that if we don't make a good confession, we=re in danger of committing a sacrilege.@

ASister's first reason is that, if our confession isn't made properly, we commit a sacrilege and add to the number of our sins and, instead of the ten we had, we carry away eleven; and if you die in such a state, dear Sisters, you=re lost. And what faults may be committed during your confession?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that they include not making a good examination of conscience, masking my sin, and not explaining it as it is.@

AAlas! yes, Sisters, it's a serious sin to lessen the gravity of your sin and to confess it other than it is. How many people will be damned for that!@

AIt seems to me, Father, that it's vanity that makes us excuse ourselves, and we really don't want people to see that our sins are as bad as they are.@

AYes indeed, it's a spirit of vanity, a diabolical spirit when, instead of accusing ourselves, we excuse ourselves. Sisters, it doesn't discredit a Sister to make known her faults. Oh no! on the contrary, when she humbles herself and says, >I=ve done such and such; I'm so wretched as to have done that,= then we see that it's the spirit of God causing her to speak in that way.

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think Daughters of Charity must know how to make a good confession?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that our predestination depends on a good confession, and we should reflect that perhaps this may be the last time God will give us the grace of going to confession.@

AYes indeed, dear Sisters, our predestination does perhaps depend on that act. In connection with this, I'll tell you that some Prelates told me at a meeting that they had taken the resolution, every time they went to confession or celebrated Mass, to reflect that it might perhaps be the last time. Just imagine, Sisters, Prelates are giving us this example!@

AIt also seemed to me that, if God gives me the grace to go to confession one more time, I could be better disposed to go another time.@

AOur Sister says that we can make a good confession to prepare ourselves for another. That may be, because to make a good confession so as to be able to make a better one at another time is very good; and in fact, the good use of the graces God gives us is not only meritorious for the present action, but also for the next and for all others.

ABut into what faults may we fall in our confessions?@

AWe can make light of our sins, thinking perhaps that it's no great matter and that we'll do better another time, or else to diminish their gravity for fear that we may be thought less of.@

AOur Sister says that if we let any sins slip by for any motive whatsoever, what will happen? Ah! Sisters, great misfortunes! The evil spirit makes himself the master. Finally, the Sister who fails to make a good confession may fall into serious sins both in public and in private. But when, on the contrary, we=ve made a good confession, God's grace is immediately restored to us, and all the good works we=ve done return with an increase of faith, hope, charity, love of God, moderation, and humility; in a word, with all the other virtues.

AAnd you, Sister, what reasons do the Daughters of Charity have to know how to make a good confession?@

AI think it's to acquire the grace of God, Father.@

AThat's good: to acquire the grace of God. We should be happy for everyone to know our sins; one of the saints has said that we should be ready to tell our sins in the public marketplace.@

AThe faults we commit in confession are human respect, which comes from vanity or even through habit, and lack of contrition. That's all the more to be feared since sometimes our sins appear trivial. It seems to me that it's good to mention some serious sin of our past life--even several.@

AYes, mentioning some serious sins from our past life is a very good means to incite us to contrition: >My God, I did such and such when I was young,= for it's to be feared that we may not have sufficient sorrow for ordinary sins.

ABut tell me, Sister, if a Sister goes to confession without manifesting any sorrow for her sins, is her confession good?@

ANo, contrition is essential.@

ABut, Sister, is it good always to accuse ourselves of the same sins?@

ANo, because we have to strive to correct ourselves; but when it happens that we fall into the same sin, we have to say so.@

AYou see, Sisters--I have to say this for the sake of some scrupulous souls--there are certain faults into which we can't prevent ourselves from falling. Even the saints, as the Holy Spirit tells us, fell seven times a day; I'm talking about letting our mind wander, flighty thoughts--even during prayers--and other similar faults. And yet that may upset a poor Sister. What should be

done then? When you keep falling into the same faults, you must humble yourselves before God, desire to be united to Him, and say, >How I should humble myself before You, my God, and long to see You!= and then patiently make acts of hope and humility, offer yourselves to God, and stir yourselves to contrition and a firm purpose of amendment.

ABut tell me, Sister, would a Sister who resented the admonitions given her be making a good confession?@

ANo, Father.@

AIs it a fault to choose a confessor, Sister?@[1]

AYes, it is, Father.@

ASister, what do you think of a Sister who wants one confessor and won't have another?@

AFather, a Sister who wants one confessor and won't have another has too great an attachment and is self-seeking.@

A >But,= you'll say to me, >he knows me better, and what he says is more relevant to me.= That's not it, Sisters, it's an attachment--not to say love--and it would become wrong as it continued. Take my word, dear Sisters, it's a propensity toward that, and to put it plainly, it's a sentimental attachment, which, if not remedied quickly, can make confession invalid. I ask God to give our Sisters the grace never to become attached to any confessor, either in this parish or in any other, and I make this prayer to God with all my heart, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, for all of you, that the confessor may not become attached, because that would be the ruin of him. God willing, I'll say Mass for that intention, Sisters--not tomorrow but Wednesday.

AIs there any fault in saying that the confessor is too harsh or too gentle, or to complain that he doesn't say anything?@

AYes, Father.@

AIs it wrong to say, >What if he told someone the sins I told him!= Is it also wrong to make known what he said to you?@

AYes, Father.@

AYes, without a doubt it's wrong, Sisters, and very wrong, for the penitent is as obliged to secrecy as the confessor, and a person who goes off and says, >He told me this and that,= sins grievously.

AIf he leads her to do something wrong or makes some flattering remark such as, >No one has pleased me so much nor given me as much satisfaction in my guidance than you have,= or any other remark that expresses affection, then, Sisters, beware of that! *Mon Dieu*! how dangerous that is! She should report it. But to whom? To her Superiors and to no one else.

AAnd you, Sister, tell me: does a Sister do wrong who argues about her penance, or even refuses the ones imposed on her, or doesn't want to go to a certain confessor because he gives penances that are not to her liking?@

AYes, Father, that seems to me to be a serious fault.@

ADoubtless a serious fault, Sisters; that reminds me of a beautiful saying of Saint Augustine, >A person who refuses his or her penance refuses forgiveness.=

ADoes someone who goes to confession without examining her conscience, without contrition, or without a desire to accept her penance or to make restitution of the property of others in her possession commit a sin?@

AYes, Father.@

ASin is never, never remitted without restitution.

AIs it a sin to economize on what belongs to the poor in a parish in order to appropriate it to yourself?@

AYes, Father.@

A*Ah, Dieu*! it's a sacrilege, Sisters, because it's taking from God something that belongs to God and using it for yourself--and I don't think a single one of you falls into that sin; no, not a one, by the grace of God--because this sin is never forgiven without making restitution, Sisters, and not only of the property but also of honor.

AYou must never speak of others, even in confession; if you can't conceal the evil done by someone else, it would be better to remain silent about your own sin. But is it to deprive a Sister of her good name if you mention a Sister's faults to her Superioress so that she may do something about it? Not at all! it should be mentioned, but never to others, for to take someone's property is nothing; but to take away one's honor is to deprive the person of everything. If that has ever happened with you, Sisters, please don't do it again.

ANow please tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AFather, the first reason for learning how to make a good confession is that we=d otherwise often be in danger of committing sacrileges. The second is that we couldn't teach poor persons nor the girls in our schools, if we didn't know how to make it well ourselves.@

AThat's a fine reason, Sisters, because you have persons who are poor here, and especially the girls in your classes, whom you have to teach how to make good confessions.@

That's why M. [Vincent],[2] turning to the priest who accompanied him, said, AWill you please write down everything those little girls should be taught on this subject? The Sister in charge of the new pupils will teach it to them because this is very important. And, as long as we live, we will please have a conference every year on this topic. I ask you, Monsieur, Mademoiselle, and you, Sister, to remind me of it. Go on, Sister.@

AAmong the numerous faults we can commit when we go to confession, I noted three principal ones, Father. First, speaking too much. That happens when we mention sins we haven't committed, when we talk about domestic matters, when we reveal the faults of our neighbor, and, lastly, when we discuss things that have nothing to do with the confession.

ASecond, speaking too little; for example, when we don't give the number and circumstances of our more serious sins, when we fail to mention certain sins, either because we=re afraid the confessor may repeat them to someone else--which we should never fear--or for any other motive.

AThird, not to state things clearly, that is, to cloak our sins so they don't appear as they really are, or to mention them as if we=re dubious about them: >If I have done such or such, I ask God's forgiveness,= when we=re not dubious at all, or to make excuses for ourselves, or to keep back a sin in order to mention it to another confessor. To my mind all these are serious faults. As for the means of making a good confession, I think it suffices to be attentive to these five points, with the grace of God.@

AThat's very good, Sister. God bless you! Mademoiselle, will you please tell us your thoughts?@

AFather, may I ask you a question regarding what has already been said?@

AYes, most certainly.@

AIf the confessor has no intention of giving absolution unless the person does the penance[3] he gives her, has the person been absolved if she doesn't do the penance?@

ANo, Sisters, the confessor gives you absolution only on condition that you do the penance he gives you, and you don't receive it if you don't do the penance.@

AAs the first reason,@ continued Mademoiselle, AI thought that when the sacrament of Penance is received properly, it really helps souls to glorify God, putting them in this state by the reconciliation it brings about with His Goodness, who pardons all their sins. A second reason is that, if we don't do our utmost to receive this sacrament well, in a certain sense we=re spurning the grace God offers us in this sacrament, by which the merits of the death of the Son of God are applied to us. The third reason is that we put ourselves in danger of dying impenitent and outside the grace of God--which we certainly deserve, since we=ve refused it.

AAs to the second point, there are many faults we can commit in regard to the preparation for making a good confession, but there are three or four major ones. One is not to have the desire to correct ourselves, since we=re in a frame of mind that hinders us from knowing our faults, or not to acknowledge them; this prevents us from being able to confess them.

AAnother fault is to fail to stir ourselves up to have deep sorrow--or simply sorrow--in the will, for having offended God. We could do this easily by applying ourselves to consider the goodness of God, His love for us, and our own perversity in having offended Him.

AA third fault is the fear of telling our sins to our confessor as they actually are. And a very great and grievous fault, for each of our sins in particular or for all in general, is not being attentive to work at correcting ourselves and of asking God for the grace to do so.

AOn the third point, the means of preparing ourselves to make a good confession, the first thing we must do is to have a high regard for this sacrament and a great desire to receive it, and, to that end, to be well instructed in all that helps us to do so. Second, to go to the confessional convinced that we=re sinners; to reflect that it's God to whom we=re about to speak, without considering the person of the priest who listens to us; to accuse ourselves as consciously of guilt and as clearly as we=re able, not making known that others are the cause of our having offended God, being very careful, above all, to conceal the accomplice of our sin without very grave necessity; and not to keep anything back. Lastly, when we=ve finished accusing ourselves, we must continue to have the remorse our sins should have given us, listen with great reverence and humility to the advice of our confessor, receive the penance with amazement that God permits it to be so small, turn our minds once more to deep regret for having offended God, and, in expectation of His mercy, listen to the holy absolution, thinking that at that moment the merit of the Blood of the Son of God, poured into our souls, washes away our sins. In this way we=re totally renewed in grace and made pleasing to the Blessed Trinity.@

AGod be praised, Sisters! I'm deeply edified by all that has been said. I think you do make good ones and, for the consolation of many of you, let me say that, as long as I=ve been hearing your confessions, I=ve been greatly consoled by them. Most of you were making very good confessions, and I like to think you=re doing even better and haven't relapsed but, on the contrary, are doing even better and better. Courage then, dear Sisters! How happy you'll be if you make your confessions in the manner described, for a good examination of conscience, contrition, a firm purpose of amendment, an integral confession, and perfect satisfaction! Blessed be God, Sisters! For that's the basis of perfection and I=d like to think that, if you act in this way, God will shower you with His graces. That is what I, though unworthy, ask Him with all my heart to do and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing over you.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

48. - INDIFFERENCE

@TEXT70 = (Now 43a.)

41. - THE LOVE OF GOD

September 19, 1649

ASisters, the subject of the present conference is the love of God, which is found in today's Gospel, where Our Lord, when asked by a Doctor of the Law which was the greatest of all the commandments, replied, >You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, etc.=[1] Our Lord allowed himself to be asked this to have the opportunity to give us the instruction included in today's Gospel. In line with that, Mlle Le Gras judged it advisable for us to study this topic, which is divided into three points. In the first point we'll see the reasons why the Daughters of Charity are obliged--like all Christians, but in a more particular manner--to love God with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their understanding, etc. In the second point, we'll see the signs by which we can know if we love God. The third point will be on the means of acquiring and increasing love in us; for it's not enough to have it, but it must continue to grow. Well now, blessed be God, blessed be God forever!

ASister, tell me the reasons why a Daughter of Charity is obliged to love God with all her heart.@

ABecause He's infinitely good.@

ARight, Sister. That's a fine answer. You see, Sisters, our Sister says that we must love God because He's infinitely good, and that's a very pressing motive; for, since He's infinitely good, He must be infinitely loved.

ABut why must a Daughter of Charity love God more than anyone else?@

AAs a Daughter of Charity, I feel infinitely obliged to love Him, Monsieur, when I think that His Goodness has withdrawn me from the corrupt mass of the world to place me in such a holy place, where all the works that are done are holy. I'm ashamed to have benefited so little from this until now. I asked Our Lord for the grace to be more attentive to it and have taken the resolution to work harder at it.@

ADo you see, Sisters, the second motive for loving God given by our Sister? The first is that God is infinitely good; that's a general motive common to every person, each of whom feels personally the effects of God's goodness. But one of the signs of this that she has seen in herself is that God has taken her out of the corrupt mass of the world and chosen her from among so many others He has left there, to bring her to such a holy place. The result is that the motive of her love, as a Daughter of Charity, is the thought of how deeply obliged she is to God for the benefit He has conferred on her in calling her into the Company; in other words, for her vocation.

AAnd how can a Daughter of Charity know if she really loves God, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that she can know it if she feels a great desire to please Him.@

AThat's truly a great sign, Sister; for, if she has a strong desire to please Him, she'll be careful not to offend Him and, on the contrary, will take care to do everything she knows is in conformity with His Will or desire. A person who wishes to please another tries to find out his feelings about things, to conform herself to them, to anticipate them, and she lets no opportunity pass of showing her a joyous, pleasant submission and respect. That's how she perceives and knows that she loves. In the same way, the person who perceives within herself this intention to please God, and is careful to neglect nothing that can give Him glory, can reasonably believe that she loves God. But how can this be seen by others, for often this interior intention to please God

is known only by the soul that experiences it? It's a relationship between God and the soul. How can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity really loves God, Sister?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that she loves Him if she keeps His commandments.@

AYou=re right, Sister! that's the very sign Our Lord gave when He said: >If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments.=[2] One of the most authentic signs that we love someone is to submit to his commands. If you see someone careful and exact in obeying every one of God's commandments, then you can say, >There's a Sister who really loves God.=

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think that a Sister from the Charity is obliged to love God?@ After listening patiently to all the reasons spelled out to him by the Sister, M. Vincent summed them up as follows: AOur Sister says that she's seen many reasons, but that God's benefits to her in her vocation have especially touched her, considering that in this state of life we not only keep God's commandments but we also observe His counsels, and it's a vocation in which we profess to love God and our neighbor. That's very touching, dear Sisters, and our Sister was right in seeing in it a powerful motive to prompt her to love God.

AAnd how can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity loves God, Sister?@ When the Sister had finished, M. Vincent added, AOur Sister has just given us a great sign to know whether a Sister loves God: if, as she says, she's careful to keep her Rules. Truly, that's an excellent sign! It's what led one of the Popes to say--and I myself have seen that Pope; it was Clement VIII[3]-->Bring me a religious who kept his Rule, and I won't need any miracles to canonize him; if I have evidence that he kept it, that's enough; I'll place him in the catalogue of the saints.= That's how much this holy Pope respected such a lofty, excellent matter as keeping one's Rule! So then, Sisters, our Sister had good reason to say of the person you see taking care to observe her Rules--not only the house rules, but also those for outside, namely, the care of the sick--that in this we'll know that she loves God. And who could doubt that this Sister loves God if we see her faithful to rising in the morning, making her prayer well, seeing that her patient has his medicine, that the soup is ready, and that everything is carried out properly; and if, after breaking her Rule through human frailty or perhaps from some apparent necessity, she immediately accuses herself of it and asks for a penance? You may be certain, Sisters, that someone who acts like that loves God.

ATell me, Sister, how can a person who already has the love of God grow in holiness and advance in His love?@ After the Sister had answered, M. Vincent added, AOur Sister is saying that one means of increasing and perfecting oneself in the love of God is to be submissive to God and our Superiors, and she speaks the truth. Submissive to God--what an excellent means to grow in His love! If I'm changed, if I'm moved about, it's God who permits it. I take it from His hand and I accept it for love of Him. Let the Superior do whatever he wants with me; I know that he's guided by the Spirit of God, and because I love God I submit to all his orders. What a lovely, excellent practice is the love of God! Our Sister said it well: it's the means of perfecting ourselves in it and of increasing it. The soul in this state is constantly making acts of love, and she does it from what's within her. It's the nature of our heart to love something. It must of necessity love God if it doesn't love the world, for it can't exist without loving. To love the world, *mon Dieu*! what a misfortune! By God's grace, we renounced that at Baptism and later, when God in His infinite mercy called us to His service, so it's natural for us to love God. And all we have to do in order to love Him is simply what our Sister has just said.

ATo this, Sisters, I'll add that there's no place on earth where you can work out your salvation more easily than in your Company; no, not one, provided you do what depends on you and in the way God asks of you. Tell me, please, can you attain a higher degree of virtue than that of our

Sisters who have gone to God, have edified us so much, leaving us such a good reputation and such a great example of their holy lives? No, I don't know anywhere you can give more to God, use your energies more freely for His love, and have greater means of growing and perfecting yourself in it than among yourselves, provided you do what you=re supposed to do.@

The Sister who spoke next gave four reasons, most of which had already been mentioned. AWhen you=re going to repeat what others have already stated,@ noted M. Vincent, Ait will suffice to say, >I had the same thought as Sister X.= So you=re saying, Sister, that you=re obliged to love God because He's infinitely good--and we=ve already mentioned that--and because He's lovable. Now, good and lovable go together, Sister, and come to the same thing, so whoever says good says lovable, and whoever says that God is lovable presupposes that He's good. You add, >Because He heard your prayers and redeemed you.= These are two strong motives that we'll reduce to one, namely, that He created you, and His infinite goodness drew you out of nothingness to make you a reasonable creature, capable of knowing and loving Him and of enjoying His glory for ever and ever. Now that's a powerful motive! I'll love God, yes, I'll love Him, and I'm obliged to do so with good reason, since I am His creature and He is my Creator and Redeemer.@

M. Vincent questioned the Sister on these signs, and after she had spoken, he went on, AOur Sister says that we can see that a Sister loves God if she does all her actions to please Him, that is, if she isn't concerned about what people will say; for, Sisters, there will always be some who find fault with what is done by God's servants. But what people say matters little to holy souls, provided their actions are pleasing to the Divine Majesty. What do you think you=re doing, Sisters, when you carry meals through the streets? You make many persons happy with that pot of soup; you delight good people, who see you on your way to work for God; you delight the poor, who are awaiting their food; and you delight God, who sees you and knows your desire to please Him by doing His work. A father who has a handsome, grown-up son is pleased to watch from a window as the boy walks boldly down the street, and this gives him unimaginable joy. In the same way, Sisters, God sees you, not through a window but everywhere, no matter where you may be, and He watches how you go off to render service to His poor members. If He sees you going about it in the right way with the sole desire of rendering Him service, it gives Him inexpressible joy. It's His great pleasure, His joy, His delight. What a happiness, dear Sisters, to be able to give joy to our Creator!@

After asking some questions on the means of loving God well, M. Vincent continued, ASister is giving us an almost infallible means of loving God; she says that it's to walk always in His presence. That's very true; the more we see someone who is the epitome of good, the more we love him. Now, if we often imagine having God before our eyes, who is beauty and perfection personified, there's no doubt that the longer we look at Him, the more we'll love Him.@

Another Sister, questioned on the reasons for loving God, replied that she had thought of several reasons already mentioned, but felt especially grateful to God because for having called her when she was so young. Most Honored Father noted this, and repeated it several times. She added that one recognized that a person loved God when she obeyed His commandments and that one means of acquiring this love was to be careful not to offend Him.

Another Sister said on the first point, AThe first reason obliging us in a very special way to love God is that this love is the most excellent of all virtues, the one that confers weight and value on all the others, and that God in His goodness has chosen us to love Him by calling us to be Daughters of Charity.

AThe second motive is that, if we don't strive to acquire this holy love, we'll spend our lives in vain, and our works will be counted as nothing.

AThe third is that, if we don't have the love of God, it will be very difficult for us to persevere in our vocation and to fulfill the obligation of our Rules and the service of the sick in the way we should.

AOn the second point I thought that we'll know whether we love God if, for love of Him, we overcome the difficulties we meet, as well as all those things contrary to our senses, reason, and will, and if we take great care to please God and greatly fear offending Him.

AOn the third point, I saw that one means of acquiring the love of God was to desire it with all our heart and to ask for it earnestly and perseveringly; and one means of increasing it was to make those acts frequently because we do more perfectly those things we practice more.@

After mentioning several reasons already pointed out by others, another Sister added that we can see whether we love God if we are distressed when we offend Him, if we like to speak of Him and, in a word, if our only intention in all our actions is to please Him, principally in matters involving the service we must render to our neighbor, who is His image.

On the third point, she noted that one means of acquiring, and even of increasing, the love of God is the reception of the holy sacraments, especially Holy Eucharist. It's impossible for us to come close to fire without being warmed, provided it be with the necessary disposition, that is, with the desire to give ourselves entirely to God and to ask Him ardently to give us His love.

AI thank God with all my heart for the lights He's given you on the present subject, dear Sisters. They are such that theologians could scarcely say more. They might perhaps say more beautiful things, but not better ones.

AAmong the reasons you cited--and they=re all weighty, important, powerful, and urgent--I'll pause only on one, which seems to me the most moving, namely, that God has commanded us to do this. Wouldn't it be enough if He had permitted it? No, it wasn't enough for His love to permit us to do it; He had to oblige us by an absolute command, involving the punishment of mortal sin for those who transgress it. If a peasant were summoned by a King to be his favorite, and the King commanded him to love him, how obligated he would feel to do so! >Alas! Sire= he=d doubtless say, >I'm not worthy of your consideration. I'm only a poor laborer.= >No matter, I want you to love me.= How greatly the kindness of this King would oblige that poor man to love him, Sisters, and to love him with his whole heart! He=d think of nothing else than the favor bestowed on him by the King.

ANow, God, who is infinitely greater than all the Kings of the earth and in whose sight we=re less than atoms, nevertheless values our love so highly that He wants to have it sole and entire. >You shall love the Lord your God with your whole soul,= He says, >with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your will.= You see, Sisters, He reserves nothing. Note that this is a commandment of sweetness and love, not one of difficulty or constraint. You'll understand this by the following consideration. If the Queen sent for one of you and said, >Come, Sister X, I=ve heard about you. I=ve been told that you=re a good Sister; that's why I sent for you to tell you that I want you to love me, but to love me dearly, and don't fail to do so.= Tell me, Sisters, what would you not do to show the Queen how grateful you were for this favor? Now, you=re certain that God wants you to love Him; He's shown it by His express command and also, as has been said, by choosing you to be Daughters of Charity, which means daughters of the love of God or daughters called and chosen to love God.

AAnother motive you gave is that God fulminates a curse against those who don't love Him.

>Let those who do not love God be anathema,= says Saint Paul.[4] A curse on those who don't love God! Yes, Sisters, God attaches such great importance and has such a high opinion of our love that it's His absolute Will that we love Him, and if we don=t, we=re accursed. What threats these are!

AHere then are two motives that I bring forward, Sisters, so as not to repeat the ones you=ve mentioned: one is God's command that we love Him; the other is the curse with which He threatens those who won't do so.

A >But,= someone will say to me, >all right; we=re quite convinced that we must love God, but what does it mean to love? How can we do it?= To this, dear Sisters, I reply that to love is to wish a person well, to desire that everyone know his merits, have great respect for them, procure for him all the honor and satisfaction within our power, and wish that everyone would do the same and that the person we love may not meet with any misfortune. The more perfect love is, the more sublime and lofty is the good we want for the beloved. Now, as nothing is more perfect than God, it follows that the love we bear Him is a sound and healthy love, tending to want His greater glory and everything that may be for His honor.

ATo understand this clearly, Sisters, you should know that there are two kinds of love: one is called affective, and the other, effective. *Affective* love proceeds from the heart. The person who loves is filled with warmth and affection, is continually aware of the presence of God, finds satisfaction in thinking about Him, and spends her life imperceptibly in such contemplation. Thanks to this love, she does, with no difficulty--and even with pleasure--the most difficult things, and is vigilant and careful concerning anything that can make her pleasing to God; lastly, she basks in this divine love and takes no pleasure in any other thoughts.

ALove is *effective* when we act for God without experiencing its warmth. This love isn't perceptible to the soul; it doesn't feel it, but it still produces its effect and completes its act. This difference, says the Blessed Bishop of Geneva,[5] may be illustrated by the example of a father who has two sons. One is still young. The father hugs him, enjoys playing with him, is delighted to hear him babble, thinks about him when he doesn't see him, feels deeply his little sorrows. If he goes out, he keeps thinking about this child; when he comes home, the first thing he does is to go to see him, and he loves him as Jacob loved his little Benjamin. The other son is a man of twenty-five or thirty years of age, already his own master, who goes where he pleases, comes home when he likes, but sees to the affairs of the house; and it seems as if his father has no tenderness for him and doesn't love him. If there's any hard work, it's this son who does it; if the father is a farm worker, it's this son who will take care of any concerns connected with work in the fields, and will lend a hand with it; if the father is a merchant, this son will work in the business; if the father is a lawyer, this son will manage the practice. And yet it seems as if the father doesn't love him.

AWhen, however, it comes to making provision for him, the father shows clearly that he loves him more than his little boy, whom he hugs so fondly, for he gives the elder the best part of his property and advances him plenty of money. And we see, from the customs of certain regions, that the eldest children get the best part of the family possessions, while the younger ones have only a small portion by law. So it would seem that, although the father has a more tangible, tender love for the little one, he has a more effective love for the older son.

ANow you see, dear Sisters, that's how the Blessed Bishop of Geneva explains these two loves. There are among you some Sisters who really love God, who experience great sweetness in prayer, great pleasure in all their spiritual exercises, great consolation in frequenting the

sacraments, and experience no inner conflict, because of their love of God, who enables them to accept with joy and submission all that comes to them from His hand.

AThere are others who don't experience God at all. They never have, they don't know the meaning of relishing prayer, and they feel like they lack devotion; yet, they don't stop making their prayer or practicing their Rules and the virtues, and they work hard, although with repugnance. Do they stop loving God? No, certainly not, for they do all that the others do and with a love that's all the stronger because they feel it less. This is effective love, which continues to be operative even though it's not apparent. Some poor Sisters become discouraged. They hear that a certain Sister is so fervent, makes her prayer well, and has a deep love of God. They experience none of that; they think all is lost, they don't belong in the Company because they=re not doing what the others are doing, and that it's better for them to leave, since they are there without the love of God.

ANow that's a mistake, dear Sisters. If you=re living your vocation, you can be sure that you love God and that you love Him incomparably more perfectly than those who feel this love deeply but don't do what you do. Note what I=ve just said, Sisters: if you=re living your vocation.

AI see some of you saying to me, >I'm doing nothing, Monsieur; I don't see any progress; nothing that's said or done moves me. I see Sisters so recollected at prayer, and I'm always distracted; if we have spiritual reading, they take so much pleasure in it, and I get bored. This seems to be a sign to me that God doesn't want me here, since He doesn't give me the spirit, as He does to others. I'm only a bad example here.= That's a deceit of the evil spirit, who strives to conceal from you the good you accomplish when you do what depends on you, dear Sisters, although you get no consolation from it.

AThere are some who are troubled when they see others abandoning their vocation. >That Sister left; why should I stay any longer? I'm doing nothing here either. If she works out her salvation well elsewhere, so might I.= And yet, although they are upset by these difficulties, they still do all that depends on them. Don't worry, Sisters. God wills you to be in this state. You don't lack His love since you are acting that way, and it's one of the greatest proofs you could give Him.

AGod's commandment to love Him with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole mind, etc., doesn't mean that He wants the heart and soul always to have a tangible experience of this love. That's a grace His Goodness imparts to whomsoever He pleases. But He intends that all our actions, by an act of the will, be done for love of Him. When you entered the Company, you saw the obligations entailed; you gave yourselves to God to fulfill all of them in His love, and every day you repeat that act. Rest assured, Sisters, that, although you may not enjoy the consolation of feeling the warmth of this love, you can't fail to have it, doing what you do for love of Him.@

ABut how can we make a perpetual act of love, Monsieur?@

AYou may be assured, Sisters, that this can easily be done by four means that I'm going to explain to you.

AThe first means of being in a continual act of the love of God is not to tolerate any bad thoughts and to keep your mind free of them, for they=re very displeasing to God, who is all-pure and holy. If any such thought occurs to you, dismiss it as soon as you perceive it, reflecting that your heart belongs to God alone, who wants nothing soiled or contaminated. There's an easy way to do this. When the clock strikes, remind yourselves that God is calling you and is saying to you,

>My daughter, love Me; my daughter, time is passing and eternity is approaching; give Me your heart.= This simple, interior act, Sisters, will put you into the presence of God, cleanse your heart, and help you to make an act of love.

AThe second means--for it's a question of establishing that all Daughters of Charity love God, and love Him always--the second means, I repeat, is never to say anything bad, never to complain, never to murmur, never to engage in conversation harmful to others, neither about those at home nor about those outside the house, and to speak well of God and our neighbor. In this way our hearts will be maintained in the love of God.@

ABut, do I have to be talking about God all the time, Monsieur?@

ANo, no! But when you do speak of Him, let it be with respect and devotion. When you=re together in a place where you can talk, speak to one another of the good you=ve seen, say how good God is and how good it is to love Him, or discuss how to serve Him in order to edify those who listen to you, and even for your own edification; if they hear you talking like this, they won't allow themselves to speak inappropriately.

The other means of loving God is to be faithful in following His rules, which are continual acts of the love of God. As soon as you rise, give your heart to God to practice your Rule and His most holy Will in this; get dressed with the same thought in mind; go to prayer with this desire and sentiment. When you=re out of the house, serve the poor in the manner laid down by the Rule. Rest assured, Sisters, that if you don't fail in this, you=re loving God and are making a continual act of love.

AThe last means of loving God continually and forever is suffering: to bear with illnesses, if God sends them; to endure calumny, if we=re unjustly criticized; to suffer interiorly the trials God sends us to test our fidelity. Good Brother Antoine,[6] a holy man and a great servant of God, whom we=ve seen here, had this practice. When he became ill, he would immediately say, >Welcome, Sister Sickness, since you come from God.= If someone said to him: >Brother Antoine, people say you=re a hypocrite, a real impostor, and you yourself should practice what you preach.= >Welcome, Sister Detraction.= People would come and say to him: >Brother Antoine, many persons are annoyed with you; they say you=re a playboy and are deceiving people.= >Welcome Sister Detraction.= He's the holiest man we=ve seen in our day. He considered everything that caused him pain and distress as being sent by God. Likewise, Sisters, when you=re told that people are dissatisfied with you, or some word or action is falsely attributed to you, say, >Welcome to what has come from my God.= If you=re ill and this prevents you from performing your exercises of piety as you=d like, praise God, who allows it to happen. Do the same thing with any difficulty or opposition you may encounter, remembering, Sisters, that you can't make a more pleasing sacrifice to God than by giving yourselves to Him to endure whatever He pleases to send you.

ASo then, there are four means by which Daughters of Charity will be in a continual act of the love of God, if they practice them. The first--we=ve mentioned it already, but I'll repeat it--is to accustom our heart to form good thoughts, and not allow it to be diverted from them by a thousand vain and useless fantasies or by unclean thoughts. By the grace of God, I don't think you are plagued by them, but rather by thoughts of envy, murmuring, and secret discontent. Oh! how that would separate you from the love of God and give you ideas of abandoning your vocation and of failing God! Watch out, dear Sisters, for they=re very dangerous. If you experience them, try to reject them and take care not to consent to them.

AAnother way of showing God that we love Him is to endure insults, calumnies, and trials--sometimes very annoying ones--that we come up against in our vocation, and which the holy love of God will mitigate. In connection with this, Sisters, don't be surprised when you hear (at these words M. Vincent's tone of voice changed and tears came to his eyes), when you hear that a Sister has left, ungrateful for the graces God has granted her. Weep for her loss, lament the deplorable state into which she is plunged, and use this example to strengthen yourselves. >But, *mon Dieu*! she was a Sister who was doing so well! She gave so much promise! It surely is the fault of the Company and Superiors.= Beware of coming to the point of doing that, Sisters.

A >But I go beyond that, for I think I could perhaps leave as she did; I'm no better, I'm even more imperfect, I'll never be able to last.= Be very much on your guard against using such language, Sisters. That's bargaining with God, bargaining with yourselves. Should that happen--or even something worse--don't get upset or discuss it with one another, or start wondering about the reasons that led Sisters to leave--for reasons will never be wanting--but renew your act of the love of God and say in your heart, >My God, so it's true that this Sister, whom You had so mercifully called, has abandoned Your service. Alas! What will become of us if You abandon us! If You didn't support me, my God, I would have already done the same, but I trust that you'll never desert me; and I, on my part, will do my utmost to be faithful to You. In the future I'll avoid the company and private complicity that have done me so much harm, and will seek out those who are stronger so that I may profit by their good example and instructions.= That, Sisters, is how you should act.

ADo you know what happens when a Prince revolts against his King, forms a faction, rebels, and takes up arms? As soon as this occurs, all the Princes who don't belong to the faction go to the King and say, >Sire, we heard that a certain person has failed in the fidelity due to Your Majesty. We=ve come to declare that we have no part in this rebellion but are ready, on the contrary, to risk our lives in your service.= Then each one renews his oath of fidelity. Those who are at a distance and can't come send a representative.

AIn the same way, dear Sisters, if you see someone, as I=ve just mentioned to you, who has failed in her promise regarding her vocation, rouse your heart to greater fidelity and say, >No, my God, even if all the Sisters should fail, with the help of Your grace, I'll be steadfast.=

AWell, that's enough for now; I don't have much time and won't delay any longer by explaining the other means to you, in the hope that the goodness of God, who has suggested them to you, will give you the grace to make use of them whenever and wherever you need them. Meanwhile I entreat Him with all my heart to animate all of you with His true and holy love, to give us the infallible marks of it, and to grant us the grace to grow in it ever more and more, so that, aided by this grace, we may begin in this world what we'll be doing eternally in the next, to which we ask the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to lead us.@

42. - LOVE OF WORK

November 28, 1649

ASisters, this conference deals with the importance for Daughters of Charity to work during the time they=re free either from the service of persons who are poor or from teaching children, in places where they=re not too busy. The first point concerns the reasons for working to earn part of their living; the second, the kind of work they should undertake; the third, what they should do so that God may be as pleased with this work as with their assistance to the sick and their other ministries.

AThese are the three points we have to discuss, Sisters. Let's look at the reasons why

Daughters of Charity must keep busy in places where they can do so without detriment to the service of the sick poor or to the education of children, as in the villages or in some small parishes in Paris.

ASister, tell us why a Daughter of Charity should work to earn part of her living.@

AOn the first point, it seemed to me, Father, that we must keep busy because Our Lord recommended that we make good use of our time; secondly, because we=re poor; and in the third place, because idleness generates bad thoughts and conversations and often destroys what grace has established in us, and which we might have preserved if we had kept busy. On the second point, it seemed to me that the work we can undertake includes spinning, sewing, and other common occupations, which we don't lack. On the third point, it seemed to me that one good means is to be devoted to it.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI think we should work in imitation of Our Lord who worked so hard when He was on earth. On the second point, I thought, as Sister just mentioned, that occupations such as sewing and spinning are the most suitable ones for us. As for means, I think that care and diligence will be good ones for us, keeping in mind that we always have to work, and always to work as if we had to hurry because, when we go slowly, we don't make much progress, and when we think there's only a little to be done, we=re not concerned with going more quickly.@

AFather,@ added another Sister, Ait seems to me that one reason to inspire us not to waste time is the example of the Blessed Virgin, who was never idle. As for the type of work, I don't see any others than those pointed out by our Sisters, except for the Sisters at the Motherhouse who have special duties and offices. A good means for making our work acceptable to God is to have some good thoughts while we=re working and not to allow ourselves any useless ones.@

AGod bless you, Sister!@ said Most Honored Father. AAnd you, Sister?@

AOne reason why we have to work to earn part of our living is that our vocation has the honor of imitating the laborious life of the Son of God; consequently, since He worked with Saint Joseph and His holy Mother to earn His living, so should we. A second reason is that we don't bring any money with us to the Motherhouse for our subsistence, we must earn our living by our work. A third is that most of us would be obliged to earn our living if we were in the world. A fourth is that this is a good way to establish our Company in solid virtue, especially in humility, which Our Lord so strongly recommended to those who want to follow Him, and which He esteemed so highly that He practiced it himself all His life.@

AIt seems to me, Father,@ stated another Sister, Athat one motive for being concerned with earning part of our living is to imitate Our Lord, Saint Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin His holy mother, who worked all their lives. In addition, our Company professes poverty. A third reason is that, if the belief that we didn't have to work to earn our living was introduced into the Company, we=d soon become lazy and our Company would go to ruin. Lastly, there's nothing so harmful to a good life as idleness.

AOn the second point, namely, the work we should do when we have some leisure time from nursing the sick and looking after the schoolchildren, or the observances of our Rules, it seemed to me that each, according to her ability, could do some of the necessary occupations, such as sewing, spinning, and others that would benefit the house or poor persons, and not things that occupy our mind too much and cause us to become engrossed in them. When I thought over how we should act so that our work may be pleasing to God and helpful to the poor, I thought that, when I begin it, I should make the intention of pleasing God by honoring the work Our Lord

Jesus Christ did on earth; and second, not to undertake anything without permission and to be prepared to give up the work when we=re told to do so or when the service of the poor demands it.@

After our most worthy Father, with his usual charity and patience, had heard what each Sister he had questioned had to say on the subject, he began to speak as follows: ASisters, I thank God for the thoughts His Goodness has given you on the present topic; all of them are good, important, useful, and practical, but, because we don't have much time, I'm not going to dwell on them.

AI'll add just two things that occurred to me, Sisters, one of which is that God has expressly commanded us to earn our living by the sweat of our brow; *in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane*,[1] He said; you shall earn your living by the sweat of your brow, that is, Sisters, by hard, painstaking labor. This commandment is so definite that no one can be exempted from it, and the work such that, by the grace of God, it serves us as a penance by the fatigue it causes the body. God didn't simply say, >You shall labor with the powers of your mind to earn your bread,= but >you shall labor by the sweat of your brow,= you shall not only labor with your mind but with your hands, your arms, your entire body, and you shall work so hard that sweat will drip from your brow. That, dear Sisters, is how we should understand God's commandment, which everyone is bound to obey.

AThe peasant we see going to his plow to till the soil and to produce the grain that will feed people fulfills this commandment, for his body suffers from it and toils at it, with the result that sweat often pours down his face.

AThe Sister from the Charity who goes out morning and evening, carrying her soup pot in hot and cold weather, not for herself but for some poor person who can't go to her for it and who would languish from need if she didn't take it to him, that Sister also fulfils this commandment, dear Sisters.

AThe second reason, Sisters, is that God, addressing the just man, says that he'll live by the work of his hands--as if He had wanted to make us understand that his greatest obligation, after that of rendering to God the service he owes Him, is to work to earn his living--and that He'll bless the pains he takes in such a way that no one will ever see him in need, he'll never be dependent on anyone, he'll live and support his family by the work of his hands, and all will go well with him. God even promises to work with him and, by working, he will bless God.

AThat's how the just man lives, dear Sisters; he lives, in accordance with God's command, by the work of his hands, and is a burden on no one. But the unjust man won't do that; because he won't take the trouble of working, he'll be a burden on others; he'll beg for his livelihood or steal. Note the difference; one is on good terms with God and others; he lives in the observance of the commandments of God and has a sufficiency of the necessities of life; the other is offensive to God, unbearable to decent people, and almost to himself because of the penury to which his idleness reduces him.

AI'm not implying that all those who live comfortably are just, dear Sisters, nor that all those who suffer from want are unjust, because we often see that, by God's permission, the wicked prosper and the good are unsuccessful. I do say, however, that no one has ever seen anyone to whom God hasn't given more than sufficient means of livelihood, when the person has been willing to work for it.

AAs opposed to the blessings God has given to the just, we have the maledictions fulminated by Him in Sacred Scripture against the idle. He refers the slothful to the ants: >Go, you sluggard=

He says, >and learn from the ant what you should do.=[2]

AThe ant, dear Sisters, is a little creature to which God has given such foresight that it brings to the community all it can amass during the summer and harvest time, to be used during the winter. You see, dear Sisters, the ant doesn't appropriate it to his personal use but brings it to the little community storehouse for the others. Bees do the same during the summer. They store up the honey they gather from flowers so they can live on it during the winter; like the ants, they, too, bring it to the community. They=re only tiny creatures, the tiniest on earth, and God has implanted in them this instinct to work, so He refers us to them to learn from their example how to work with foresight.

AThe third reason we have, as was mentioned--*mon Dieu*! it was mentioned and other beautiful ideas were added to it--is this, namely, that God himself works incessantly, has worked incessantly, and will work incessantly. He works from all eternity within himself by the eternal generation of His Son, whom He'll never cease to beget. The Father and the Son have never stopped loving each other, and this mutual love has eternally produced the Holy Spirit, by whom all graces have been, are, and will be distributed to us.

AGod also works incessantly from outside himself in the creation and preservation of this great universe, in the movements of the heavens, in the influences of the stars, in the productions of land and sea, in the nature of the atmosphere, in the regulation of the seasons, and in all that beautiful order we observe in nature, which would be destroyed and return to nothingness if God was not constantly guiding it.

AIn addition to this general work, He toils with each individual: with the craftsman in his shop, with the woman in her household, with the ant and the bee to do their collecting, and He does so constantly and continually. And why does He labor? For us, dear Sisters, only for us, to preserve our lives and to procure for us everything we need. *Eh quoi*! if a God, Emperor of the entire world, has never for a single moment stopped working interiorly and exteriorly ever since the world has been the world, and even in the lowliest of earth's productions, with which He cooperates, how much more reasonable that we, who are His creatures, should work, as He's said, in the sweat of our brow! A God works incessantly, and a Daughter of Charity would remain idle! She=d convince herself that all she has to do is to serve poor persons! And when she has few or none of them, she=d remain idle! Let's be very careful about that, dear Sisters; let's avoid idleness like death--what am I saying? Let's avoid it as we would avoid hell.

A >But we=re busy from morning till night, Monsieur; we scarcely have time to eat our meals, and most often, not on time.= Well and good, dear Sisters. I praise God for that with all my heart. I would hope that it might please His Goodness that all of you would be like that. I know that in Paris there's a great deal of work, that very often three wouldn't suffice for what two have to do, and that if there were forty-eight hours in the day, you=d find plenty to keep you busy; but I'm also well aware that there isn't the same amount of work in the country, that everywhere there aren't enough patients to take up all your time, and that in Paris itself there are parishes where the work isn't so heavy. Granted, there aren't many of these parishes, but there are always a few, and I'm speaking mainly of them, dear Sisters, although you should never waste time in a single one of them.

AIf you really knew the misery entailed by idleness, dear Sisters, you=d avoid it as you would avoid hell. It has been said--and it's true--that it's the cause of bad thoughts and conversations. Alas! that's only too true, Sisters; it's their wet-nurse. How will two persons with nothing to do occupy themselves, if not first of all in useless and dangerous conversations? Then they'll go on

to make damaging and disparaging remarks, gossip, fabricate lies, murmur against Superiors, criticize the Rules, speak contemptuously of them and build castles in the air. Don't I myself know what extravagant notions can pass through an idle mind? They'll have a thousand bad thoughts, a thousand unclean fancies about this man or that woman, about some young man they met--although, by the mercy of God, I know of no such persons among you, dear Sisters, and that His Goodness preserves you from these disorders in a very special way. Yes, we can say to the glory of God that He takes special care to preserve your purity, but this mustn't be abused.

AIdleness also generates petty grudges, problems, and jealousy. Often these are purely imaginary and groundless. An idle person will make a thousand reflections contrary to the respect she owes to God; she'll destroy that peace she ought to make reign in her soul and will form judgments contrary to the charity she owes her neighbor.

AWhat did Our Lord do when He lived on earth, dear Sisters? Someone has said it, so I have little, and almost nothing, to add. I'll simply say that He led two lives on earth. One, from His birth until His thirtieth year, during which He worked to earn His living in the sweat of His divine brow. His trade was that of a carpenter; he was a hod carrier, an unskilled laborer, and a bricklayer's assistant. From His youth He worked from morning till night and continued until He died. Heaven and earth blush with shame at the sight of such a spectacle.

AThat, dear Sisters, is how God acted--God, the Sovereign Lord of the whole world, to whom all creatures owe infinite honor. We see Him living by the work of His hands, in the lowliest and most difficult occupation there was; and we, wretched, miserable creatures, we would be useless! And a Daughter of Charity would want to spare herself!

AThe other stage of the life of Jesus Christ on earth is from the age of thirty until His death. During those three years what did He not do, day and night, going off to preach without a break, now in the temple, now in a village, in order to convert the world and to win over souls to His Father? During that time, what do you think He lived on, dear Sisters? He possessed nothing on earth, not even a stone on which to lay His divine head, in which Eternal Wisdom dwelt. So, He lived on the alms given Him by Mary Magdalen and the other devout women who followed Him to listen to His sermons. He went to the homes of those who invited Him and continued to work day and night and at all hours, sometimes going to places where He knew souls might be won, sometimes to the home of a sick person, to heal first his body, then his soul. In this, He wanted to point out two stages to the Daughters of Charity who serve the sick: one, during which they look after their temporal needs, and the other, while serving them or after having done so, during which time they may say some good word to encourage them to make a good confession, to prepare them to die well, or to take good resolutions to lead a better life, in the event that God should restore them to health. To act in this way, dear Sisters, is to imitate Our Lord's conduct on earth; and to earn your living in this way, without wasting time, is to earn it as Our Lord did.

ASaint Paul, that great Apostle and thoroughly divine man, that vessel of election, earned his living by the work of his hands. In the midst of his heavy labors, his important ministries, his continual preaching, he took time, either by night or by day, to be self-sufficient so as not to have to ask for anything from anyone. >You know,= he says in one of his talks, >that I=ve demanded nothing of you, and that the bread I eat to sustain my body was earned by my own hands.=[3] Who will not blush with shame at such an example? It wasn't a young woman who was speaking, nor an ordinary man, but a man of good social standing by birth, learning, and virtue; and this man had such a high opinion of the holy poverty taught by Jesus Christ that he would have scrupled eating a piece of bread that he had not earned. If his important ministries didn't allow him to

work during the day, he=d take some time from his night's rest.

AIn those days it was a holy custom in the Church for everyone to work. In the beginning, members of religious Orders earned their own living. After assisting at Divine Office, they busied themselves making mats and wicker baskets, which they would sell. And this was done even in Saint Bernard's day; four hundred years ago his religious and he himself worked. But, since everything grows slack with time, this holy custom was done away with, and that has had serious consequences, for since then domestic discipline has ceased to be as austere as when religious were subject to work.

ANow, do you see, dear Sisters, how good it is for you to work, for then you=re no burden in the places to which you=re called? That's an important point because, that being the case, you can always render service to God, and with commendation, even though you shouldn't seek it. You won't be obliged to ask for more than people can give you. And should you happen to have more than you need, you know that the surplus is used to form other young women who will one day render service to God as you do and will serve their neighbor, and God will be glorified by them. Members of religious Orders render service to God and are the support of the Church, but most of them--at least those in the mendicant Orders--are dependent. It's true that they do no wrong in this because that's their Rule. Take, for instance, the Franciscans, who practice such strict poverty; such a life is great in the sight of God, but they=re dependent and possess nothing; they live in destitution and poverty because they have no endowments. But you, you can earn a sufficient livelihood by serving your neighbor; you=re not a burden on anyone; you provide for yourselves. Would to God that I could do the same, I who am unworthy of the bread I eat; would that it were permissible for me to earn my living and to be able to serve my neighbor without possessing anything or being dependent on anyone! Would to God that our priests could do so and that we were obliged to forsake everything we have! God knows how willingly we=d do so. But we can=t, and we have to humble ourselves because of it.

AIf God is pleased to grant you the grace of being able some day to earn your living, dear Sisters, and to be able to serve villages that are unable to support you, I know of nothing more beautiful. *Quoi*! by working for others, Sisters will be in a place where they'll be serving poor persons and educating girls with no contributions whatever, able to do so thanks to the work they themselves have done during their free time! What a favor, Sisters, and what a blessing of God that you who are already in a village or in the parishes, serving persons who are poor and teaching children, contribute by your work to help others do the same good in the future by bringing your surplus to the Community! If, as we=ve already seen, bees do this by gathering honey from flowers and taking it back to the hive to feed the others, why wouldn't you, who should be like heavenly bees, do likewise? If God is pleased, Sisters, to grant this grace to your Company, that, through you, poor persons will be served, children instructed, and this house enabled to subsist as it has hitherto done and to admit and form the young women who present themselves with the intention of serving God, and who, in their turn, will render Him the same services as you do, won't that be a great happiness for you? You=re obliged to do this, as far as you can, dear Sisters; at least you should never neglect to do anything for this purpose. Let each of you say to herself, >This is the house in which I=ve been raised; they did me the kindness of accepting me and welcoming me here; it's only reasonable for me to do my share in defraying its expenses so that it can continue to extend the same charity to the Sisters who come after us, and the Company may not stop nor discontinue the good it has begun.=

AThat good is substantial, Sisters, greater than you could imagine or than I can express. Take,

for instance, two Sisters living in a parish; what do they not do? What do we hear people say of their way of life? It's a life absolutely divine, a life like Jesus Christ led on earth; God works continually with them, and He really must, dear Sisters, for they wouldn't be able to do what they=re doing. I'm thinking right now of two of our Sisters, who are in a place where they don't have much to do and have enough to live on; I'm worried about them and fear that this may be an occasion for them to grow lax and become lazy. I=d prefer that the foundation had not been made, dear Sisters, because that will cause the ruin of your Company. When our Sisters are comfortably established and don't have enough to do, they'll neglect the work they do have and won't bother going to visit the poor. Then we'll have to say good-bye to the Charity; it's no longer the Charity; it's buried; then we'll have the funeral of the Charity. That's what will happen if God doesn't maintain it. I myself won't see it, for I won't be on this earth much longer; but you, to whom God will give a long life, you'll see it.

ASo, give yourselves to God, dear Sisters, to work earnestly, in imitation of His Divine Majesty who works unceasingly, although He needs nothing; and, like the bees, bring your surplus to the Community so that, once you=ve made provision for your own needs, you'll be contributing to the formation of other Sisters.

A >But what jobs can we do? We can't undertake something that requires a lot of time; furthermore, we don't know how to do everything people may give us to do.= My reply to that, Sisters, is that sewing and spinning are the most suitable jobs you can do. Everyone needs linen, and you can be sure that, if you take on that kind of work, you'll always have plenty to do, either for your own use, or for the poor, or for children, or others; you'll never be without it.

A >But what should we do to make this work pleasing to Our Lord?= Someone said it, dear Sisters, and such beautiful remarks have been added to that. In the first place, you must work to please God, who takes His joy and delight in seeing you busily engaged for a good purpose. Now, rest assured that your aim is pleasing to Him. So have no doubts that you=re doing something acceptable to God.

ASecondly, the goal of your work should be to honor the painful, exhausting toil of Our Lord on earth, who lent His divine body to the heaviest labors, without sparing himself.

AIn the third place, you must do it with the thought that you=re working to serve your neighbor, who is so dear to God that He considers as done to himself whatever is done for the relief of others.

AIn the fourth place, we have to rid ourselves of the spirit of avarice. Someone made a good remark when she said that we mustn't have things with a view to profit. *O mon Dieu*! no! that would spoil everything. If a Daughter of Charity planned, by working, to amass one *écu* after another in order to have money on hand or to be better fed, that would be displeasing to God and would give bad example to good people.

A >Monsieur,= a gentleman said to me yesterday, >for the last eight years I=ve given myself to God not to make any profit from my possessions. Once I'm fed and clothed, I give the surplus to the poor. I'm well aware that I won't be able to provide a position for my son, but I couldn't act otherwise.= He's a man of the world, dear Sisters, who doesn't have to do anything, and who has children; yet, after simply providing himself with the necessities of life, he gives everything else to the poor, even going so far as to sell and mortgage his property. We should sell ourselves to rescue our brothers and sisters from destitution, and would a Daughter of Charity be so despicable as to reserve something for herself and say, >How do I know what may happen? I may not always be a member of the Company; if I should leave it, I=d always have this.= Oh!

that cursed >How do I know!= A damnable idea, suggested by the demon to be an occasion for the downfall of those Sisters who would listen to him! It's not that I'm aware that any of you are so inclined; I know that all of you are attached to the Motherhouse and well disposed in its regard.

AI ask God, who, from all eternity, worked within himself; I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who worked here on earth, even as a laborer; I ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to work hard; I ask Saint Paul, who earned by the work of his hands the bread on which he subsisted; I ask all those holy religious who did manual labor and achieved sanctity that it may please the goodness of God to forgive us for the time we=ve so often wasted, especially myself, who am most unworthy of the bread I eat and which God gives me; I repeat, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the grace to work in imitation of Him; I ask the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to obtain this grace for us from the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name and on whose infinite goodness I rely, I will now pronounce the words of blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

43. - HOW TO ACT AMID DIFFICULTIES<R>WHEN FAR FROM THE MOTHERHOUSE

April 19, 1650

AThe subject of the present conference, dear Sisters, is what Daughters of Charity should do when they are living away from the Mother House, especially in the country and in very distant places, and have a temporal or spiritual difficulty; for instance, when they=re in doubt and are distressed interiorly concerning their Rules--for, at times some are contradictory in their ministries--or difficulties regarding imperfections, inconveniences, or devotional practices, and especially confession, Communion, physical mortifications, and interior communications.

AThe topic is divided into three points, Sisters. The first deals with the reasons we have for knowing clearly how to act when such difficulties arise outside the Motherhouse; the second, what we should do in those circumstances; the third, what each Sister has done when she found herself in similar trials, and some resolutions to take on this point for the future.

AThis conference, Sisters, doesn't concern the Sisters of this house nor the ones who live in Paris, because they=re at the source of the remedies, but only those living in the country, especially in very distant places, where they=re perhaps deprived of any consolation and unable to have the problem solved by their Superiors because the matter is too urgent and the distance too great. But because each and every one of you should be ready to set off at once to wherever you may be sent, it's good for each of you to know what she should do if she finds herself in a place where she might have this need.

AIsn't it important, Sister,@ said M. Vincent, turning to a Sister, Afor us to know how we should act when we=re far from the Motherhouse and some difficulty arises for which we may need advice?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that one reason for wanting to be informed about what we have to do in such needs is that it will put our minds very much at ease if we are.@

AAnd what would you do, Sister, if some trial or temptation arose when you were far away and didn't know where to turn for advice?@

ASince we don't go alone to places, I think it would be appropriate, Monsieur, to mention it to the Sister with whom I=d be living.@

AYes, Sister, you=re right, but it should be done prudently and according to the nature of the matter. If, for instance, it concerns the care of the sick or the instruction of children, you may--and even should--say something like, >*Mon Dieu*! Sister, I'm worried because it seems as if the

care of the patients here isn't what I=ve seen it to be elsewhere; I notice a certain abuse. What do you think? Can't we do something about it?= The same for schools. But if the problem were such that the Sister might not be able to suggest any way to solve it, or even if it were prudent to conceal it from her, then you might say to her, >Please don't worry if you see that I'm a little sad, Sister; I have something on my mind. Just pray for me. I hope from the goodness of God that this will pass, but I'm so weak that I can't help showing it.=

AYou also said that you should have confidence in the person given you as your spiritual guide, Sister. Yes; in fact, that's a great means of setting your mind at rest. If you think of something that's bothering you, for which you may feel the need of advice, turn confidently to him. God won't allow him to say anything that isn't for your good.@

When another Sister remarked that it was good to put one's mind at rest and to try to be patient, M. Vincent added, ASister has said, and rightly so, that once you=ve think you=ve done all you should have on that point, if you=ve told another Sister about your trouble and no remedy is found for it, or if it should be something we may not share with her without worrying her, and if you=ve mentioned it to the confessor appointed by your Superiors and you=re still not at peace, then you have to believe that God is allowing it to be this way, adore His guidance, practice patience, and strive to preserve peace of mind amid worry or temptation.@

Another Sister said that she had found no better means than to kneel at the foot of the crucifix and tell her troubles to Our Lord with confidence and submission, resigning herself to His holy Will. AYou=re so very right, Sister, and that's one of the best means you could find to do the Will of God and to be at peace. That has been the practice of nearly all the saints. I remember that the late wife of the General of the Galleys[1] used to do that. Once, her confessor[2] was traveling to a place fifty leagues away, and she said to him, >Well, Monsieur, you=re going away; to whom shall I turn in my troubles?= >Madame,= he replied, >God will provide. You could go to Monsieur X and Monsieur Y, the former for your ordinary confessions, and the latter for advice if the other one doesn't satisfy you; and if neither of them brings you peace of soul, I advise you, Madame, to seek it at the foot of the crucifix. There you will lovingly present all your difficulties to the Son of God, you will make acts of trust and of resignation to His good pleasure, honoring the abandonment in which He found himself when in a similar state, deserted by those who had the greatest obligations toward Him, and deprived of all tangible consolation to the point where He believed himself abandoned by His Eternal Father. There you will contemplate the use He made of His sufferings, Madame, and, with the help of His grace, you'll have a happier outcome than I can tell you.=

AThis good lady did as she was told, Sisters, and a few days later she wrote to her confessor: >I=ve tried the means you suggested for finding peace of mind in my troubles, Monsieur, but I=ve found none better than that of kneeling at the foot of a crucifix. What men said to me wasn't what I was looking for, but I did find it there, along with all the consolation that creatures were unable to give me.=

AThat's the only remedy, Sisters, and if you=ve ever tried it, I'm sure you'll never find one that's more efficacious. You were truly inspired, Sister, and I ask God to bless you.

AYou, Sister, sitting next to her, please tell us what a Sister should do when she finds herself far away, is troubled in mind, and doesn't know where to turn for advice.@

AI think, Monsieur, that the simplest thing is to put ourselves in the hands of God and to trust in His goodness. In addition, it seems to me that if we=re living with a Sister we trust, we can

ask her permission to write to Superiors.@

ABlessed be God! Sister confirms what the other Sister just said about the peace to be found in abandoning yourself to God, and she added that it's well to write about the matter. Now, Sisters, you should know that when you want to write to a relative, a friend, or someone else, you have to ask the Sister Servant's permission, and, once the letter is written, to give it to her to be sent if she thinks fit, or to be retained, if she thinks it better to do so. This is done in all well-regulated Communities, and we do the same at our house. Not one of our priests or Brothers would write to anyone whomsoever without first coming to ask permission, then bringing me the letter, which I read and either send or keep, depending on the circumstances. If I'm not there, they go to the other Superiors, who do the same. >But that's very hard, Monsieur. *Quoi*! I write something (which doesn't happen very often) and my letters must be read, and they risk not being sent if they=re not acceptable!= Yes, Sisters, it has to be that way; otherwise there would be no order: one would write in her own style, and someone else in another. That's the custom in all well-regulated houses. But when it's a question of writing to Superiors or to the Directress, then, Sisters, there's no need to ask for permission nor to show your letters to anyone. You=re absolutely free to write to them; you should even do so whenever you feel the need, without having to ask the Sister Servant's permission, and she must have nothing to say about it because that's the order that has to be preserved.

AThe same is true for letters that come in; when they arrive, you shouldn't read them until the Sister Servant has first seen them, nor should they be given or sent to the Sister to whom they=re addressed. That's what's done everywhere. Do you think that in our house a letter is given to anyone but me? All letters for individuals are first brought to me and, when I=ve read them, I give or keep them, as I think fit. But when you get a letter from Superiors or from the Superioress, the Sister Servant has no right to read it; she should deliver it, sealed, the moment she receives it, and if the Sister says to her, >Sister, would you like to read this?= she mustn't do it but say to her, >I=d better not, Sister; it belongs to you, and I shouldn't touch it.= @

At this point M. Vincent was called away on some urgent business and left M. Portail to speak in his place. AYou=re really going to be deprived, Sisters, because M. Vincent left you on such a beautiful path. You had begun to taste the sweetness of his words and suddenly you=ve been cut off from them. You=re left with me now, and I'm just the opposite from him. But I'm under obedience, and maybe he'll be able to come back to finish what he started. If he does, you'll be very fortunate. Meanwhile, since he has given orders, we'll say what God will inspire us on the topic that's being discussed.

APlease tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AMonsieur, the first reason that occurred to me for knowing how we should act when in difficulty and at a distance from the Motherhouse is that, if we didn't know, we=d be in danger of displeasing God by acting contrary to what we=re supposed to do because we weren't duly informed. This might cause us great interior distress and keep us from being at peace with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves and, consequently, would separate us from God, who dwells only in a place of peace.

ASecondly, we put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation because, if we don't know how to act amid great difficulties, we'll easily allow ourselves to go to persons who, not having the spirit of the Motherhouse, might advise us to do the opposite of what we=re supposed to do, and that would bring about our total ruin. When, on the contrary, we=re well informed as to how to act in such circumstances, we'll be preserved in the spirit of the Company wherever we may be.

AOn the second point, I thought, with regard to material things, that, if we=re near the Motherhouse, it's well to come and tell our Superiors what we think, with the intention of following their advice; and if we=re so far away that we can't come, we should place ourselves in the presence of God and, after asking His assistance, do what His Goodness will inspire us to do and what we think is permitted by our Superiors. For spiritual matters and interior trials, however, I think we should seek consolation entirely in God, accept them cheerfully for love of Him without worrying about them, and bear with them as long as it pleases Him; and we shouldn't appear to be in a bad mood or let our Sisters notice anything. To be in this state, I think I have to ask it earnestly of God, and that was my resolution, with the help of His holy grace.@

AOur Sister has mentioned a very compelling and remarkable motive, and we should study it a little. She says that, if we didn't know the right thing to do, we=d put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation. Maybe that's more serious than you think, Sisters, for you shouldn't say to yourselves, >If I weren't in that place, I=d be somewhere else, where I could work out my salvation just as well; people are saved everywhere.= Bear in mind, Sisters, that someone who loses her vocation is like a fish out of water. A fish can't live very long out of the water; it dies immediately. Why? Because water is its element, and it's out of it. In the same way, the Community is the element of Daughters of Charity who are called to it. As long as they remain in it, they=re alive and have the grace to work out their salvation, but if they=re out of it, they don't know what to do any more, and most of those who abandon their vocation are lost, if God doesn't rescue them by a very extraordinary act of mercy. I don't mean only those who leave from this house, but, in general, all the men and women who abandon their vocation, wherever they=ve been called, for they=re all unfaithful to God and insult Him by spurning the graces He gave them and not using them as they should.

AIn connection with this, I have to tell you something, although I do so with great sorrow because it concerns a man who was one of us; but that doesn't matter, it will help you to see how dangerous it is to lose one's vocation. A young man from a good family, addicted to immorality and worldly vanity, was placed with us by his father, who feared his bad conduct. For nearly a year he was confined to a room, where no one saw him except a member of the house, to make him aware of his duty. He was there like a prisoner. Toward the end of the year, he was touched by God and felt a great desire not only never to return to his excesses but to do penance for them, withdraw from the world entirely, and serve God in the Congregation of the Mission. After persevering for some time in this desire, he was admitted. He did very well and everyone was edified by him. He was always to be seen performing acts of humility and seeking the things that were lowly and humble. When he made repetition of prayer, we thought we were listening to an angel. His fervor and devotion were unparalleled.

AThat lasted about two years. After that he began to grow lax, then to do everything negligently and to slip back. He was ruined by the company of certain bad persons who had no great love for the Community. He left on the pretext of doing better elsewhere. He wore his cassock and still seemed to want to be a priest, but soon went back to the ways of the world. He rode about on horseback and behaved quite differently from the way a man of God should act. He was a courtier-clergyman. He slipped again, for I saw him yesterday without any ecclesiastical attire; he was dressed as a cavalry man and was about to set out for the army.

ANow, please tell me, isn't it true that his salvation is in jeopardy? Perhaps he'll be killed, and God knows in what condition, for he no longer has the sentiments of piety he formerly manifested. Now he talks like a freethinker and an atheist; he's beginning to have doubts and

says he doesn't believe in much of anything. That's the state of a man who has lost his vocation, but who once seemed like an angel.

ASo, dear Sister, you were right to say that, by not knowing what we=re supposed to do, we put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation; and also for remarking that this is a great misfortune, for doubtless the greatest misfortune that could befall a person called by God to serve Him in a certain way of life would be to abandon it. We rarely ever fall into such a state when we continue to observe the sound customs that the Rules and Superiors teach us. I=ve noticed that, in the ten to twelve years I=ve had the honor of serving the Company, most of the Sisters who have left did so because they didn't consult others in their difficulties. Some wanted a different ministry, others wanted another companion. We harbor aversions and don't mention them. This festers in our hearts. We have trouble with one Rule that we don't know how to reconcile with another, for occasionally there are Rules that contradict one another and, by failing to seek clarification, we fall into abuses and weariness. We go to confession and never say a word about this. Meanwhile, our minds continue to be troubled. Should some unexpected occasion arise, we lay down our arms. I=ve spent a little extra time on this point because it's very important.@

Another Sister said that it seemed to her that, when we=re deprived of assistance, one good means is to offer God a Holy Communion that He may be pleased to consider our troubles or distress.

M. Portail questioned another Sister, who then asked two questions. The first was whether, whenever we feel upset, it might not be advisable, before anything else, to begin by going to Holy Communion, before seeking a remedy elsewhere.

AYou=re right, dear Sister,@ replied M. Portail. AIt's well to begin with that. Prayer is excellent; it's good to kneel before a crucifix, but it's even better to be united with God in Holy Communion. The other means are only accessory; this is the principal one. After that, if the trial persists, we'll have greater strength to endure it, and the prayer we make will be more efficacious. If we find it hard to say what's bothering us, this will make it easier for us; if we=re in a place where we have no one, God will inspire us; but, as long as you=re at the Motherhouse, Sisters, confide in your Superioress or in your Directress; they have the spirit of God to guide you and they will obtain it for the Sisters they'll give you wherever you go, and you should look upon it as certain that you'll never be mistaken in following their advice. We should have greater confidence in the Superiors God has given us than in an angel from heaven because it's through them that God tells us what He wills of us. He has said so himself: >Whoever hears you, hears me.=[3] If, on the one side, you saw an angel, who was ordering you to do something, and Our Lord should tell you to do something else, you=d be obliged to ignore what the angel might say to you, in order to do what Our Lord would tell you.

ABut, to benefit by what your Superiors say, dear Sisters, go to them with a right intention in order to become better, not out of spite or revenge, or to vent your anger and show resentment and aversion, or out of some kind of bravado. Sisters who would go to Superiors without the right intention, far from leaving their concerns there, would carry back additional ones. Go to them in a straightforward way, with the intention of carrying out punctually all they may tell you to do, looking on your Superior as God, listening to him and obeying him as you=d obey God. In this way you can rest assured that God will bless your compliance and give you the peace of mind you=re seeking.@

The other question was to know whether, when we=re living far away and those who have

made the establishment of the house or contributed to it need our assistance, we should give it to them at the expense of our service of the poor. This was discussed in various ways. Mademoiselle cited the Rule by which we=re forbidden to serve rich persons who have the means of being served by others. M. Portail advised us to excuse ourselves courteously from doing so, alleging the danger into which poor persons might fall if they didn't get food or medicine at the proper time. He added that, if the service requested could be rendered outside the time we serve the poor and was simply a case of assistance to the sick, such as preparing soups or medicines, we could do it, provided it happened rarely, didn't take up much time, and didn't do a disservice to the local surgeons.

When another Sister was questioned, she replied, AThe first reason for being informed of how to act when problems arise for us in distant places is so that we won't do anything inappropriate or harmful to the Company, our neighbor, or ourselves. Another reason is that this keeps us in conformity with the spirit and line of conduct of the Company; for, if some difficulty should arise, I=d reflect before God as to what would be for His greater glory and would try to remember what I heard my Superiors say on similar topics, in order to judge from that what I could do to act in conformity with their intentions. If the matter were such that I could mention it to the Sister with whom I was living, I=d talk it over with her in the hope that God would give her His Spirit for that; if it was a matter of conscience, I=d confess whatever sin I recognized, make the resolution to give it up, and try to put my mind at rest. My resolution was to do my utmost, with the help of God, to acquire the spirit of the Company and its maxims during the time I have the happiness of being at the Motherhouse, so that I can make use of them when God permits me to be far away from it.@

ANow there's a motive,@ said M. Portail, Athat hasn't yet been mentioned, namely, uniformity. You must conform yourselves to the spirit of the Motherhouse so that you will not only be recognized by your attire and headdress but also by the way you act. You see how necessary that is, dear Sisters, so please pay close attention to it. That's why you have to train yourselves in this. Soldiers going to war are in training before they leave, and even in peace time they still have to carry out military exercises frequently. And why do they have to do that, if not to be fully experienced when they have to go into battle? For, if they hadn't drilled beforehand, it's to be feared that they=d lack experience at the time they go off to war. Now, the Daughters of Charity wage war against the devil by the instructions they give the sick poor, when they go to visit them and teach them about God and the chief mysteries of our religion; this is what helps persons who are poor to think of their salvation and avoid the sins that put them in the power of the devil. They also wage war against him by teaching little girls, in whom they instill the fear of God and the desire of virtue. Above all, they wage war against him by the good example they give by their charity in assisting their neighbor, by their modesty, their humility, and all the other virtues they practice.@

43a. - INDIFFERENCE

July 14 [1650][1]

ASo then, Sisters, the topic of the present conference is indifference, dealing with the disposition a Daughter of Charity should have to go any place whatsoever, whether she be sent or called there, and with any Sister, and the means of keeping themselves from yielding to the weaknesses that could make them want to leave there.

ASister, would you please tell me your thoughts on this?@

AAs for the reasons we have for going any place whatsoever, I thought that it's to obey the

Will of God; to keep the promises we made on entering the Company, when we were told we=d have to go wherever we might be sent; and to imitate the Apostles, who went everywhere without any repugnance. As for the Sisters, I think we must have no preference, but accept all of them cheerfully, always putting the blame on ourselves for any difficulties that may arise.@

On the same topic, another Sister said, AThe first reason we have for going where we=re sent and for accepting the Sister with whom we'll be living is that we=re obliged to live under obedience and are assured that this is how we do God's Will and work out our salvation. Furthermore, it's by changing places that we imitate the life of the Apostles because, just as they went about to preach Jesus crucified, we also must go to many places and, by our good example, proclaim that there is a God for whom we=re working. As for Sister companions, we should all have the same spirit, and by this means, we won't have any difficulty being with one or the other Sister.@

AOn the reasons we have for going wherever our Superiors may think fit,@ remarked another Sister, Ait seemed to me that we dispose ourselves for this by acquiring great charity and forbearance in order to be tolerant with those who may not be according to our spirit.@

On the same point, another Sister added that the virtue of obedience obliges us to do this, as well as the good example we should give, and our participation in the merit of the Community.

AAn additional reason,@ noted a Sister, Afor being always disposed to go anywhere and with any Sister whomsoever is to reflect that we=ve given ourselves to God to that end, and that wherever we go we'll find God and glorify Him, if we=re faithful to what He asks of us. A further reason is that, although we may be far from the Motherhouse and our Sisters, we=re always united with them and share in all the good done there. A third reason is that no matter which Sister we may be with, it's God who has united us with her; consequently, it's for our advancement. If her temperament seems incompatible with ours, we can think that God has permitted this to give us the opportunity to practice virtue, especially gentleness and patience, and that the saints would have been pleased to have similar opportunities of practicing virtue, since we know that some of them obliged themselves voluntarily to live with bad-tempered persons in order to glorify God by the submission they manifested toward them.@

When Mademoiselle was asked by Most Honored Father to say what inspirations God had given her on this subject, she replied, AAs the first reason we have for being always and at all times disposed to go everywhere and with any of our Sisters, I thought that this disposition was absolutely necessary in order to be faithful to God's plan in establishing this Company, which otherwise couldn't give Him the glory His Goodness wills to draw from it, nor the service we owe to persons who are poor. The second reason is that by this disposition we lend credence to the truth of the attribute God gives himself, namely, that He is a jealous God, who wants our heart entirely, and that we=re prepared without reserve to do His holy Will, made known infallibly to us by that of our Superiors. The third is that, without this disposition, a Daughter of Charity can't truly be said to be a member of the Company, since her example alone, if it were followed, would be capable of causing great hindrances and disorders to all the others. It's even to be feared that it might be the beginning of the total ruin of the Company.@

The second point concerned what Daughters of Charity must do to prevent themselves from yielding to those weaknesses and the flightiness that might lead them to want to be separated from their Sister.

On this point a Sister said, AI thought that what we can do to remedy those weaknesses and the flightiness that enter our minds is to place ourselves at the foot of the Cross and reflect on the

sufferings of the Son of God in the difficulties that arise.@

AIt seemed to me,@ noted another Sister, Athat the means to remedy such weakness and flightiness is to regret them as soon as we become aware of them, without dwelling on them any longer.@

AIt seemed to me,@ added another Sister, Athat one good means of thwarting the influence of these weaknesses and flightiness is not to tell our little difficulties to laypersons because they might suggest solutions harmful to our situation, but we should rather tell them to our Superiors.@

Another Sister stated that she saw no more sovereign remedy against the harm that might be caused by these weaknesses and flightiness than a great desire to suffer, which would stifle all our repugnances and keep us from mentioning them to anyone but our Superiors.

Another Sister said that when these thoughts arise, it's well to think that this is God's Will, to adore this same Will, to regard as a temptation any thoughts that might persuade us to the contrary, and to ask God's help not to give in to them.

To this Mademoiselle added, AOne of the means to keep ourselves from having dispositions contrary to that is to offer ourselves frequently and unreservedly to God in our prayers and Holy Communions. Another means is, as soon as we perceive any sort of aversion or dislike for the place where we=re sent or for the persons with whom we=re placed, even for our Sister--or some of our Sisters if there are several of us--is not to allow this passion to take root but to take care in the beginning to make contrary acts, to go to Communion with this intention, and, if we don't feel that this gives us strength, to examine carefully where that might come from, to ask God's forgiveness for it, and to be renewed by the thought of the first fervor that made us give ourselves to God. If, however, this were to continue for any length of time, we should tell our Superiors about our temptations and about ourselves, and follow exactly the advice God will allow them to give us, humbly asking Him for the grace to do it, and praying to the Blessed Virgin and our Guardian Angel for the same intention.@

After all the Sisters questioned had spoken (we haven't mentioned all of them because several gave the same thoughts), Most Honored Father began to speak as follows: ABefore anything else, Sisters, I'm going to tell you how you should give an account of your mental prayer. Those who can write should put it down on paper: the conference is on such and such a subject; the first point is such and such; the first reason that occurred to me on this was such and such; the second, this or that; and so on. After that will come the second point, which concerns the means. Mention the first means, then the second, the third, and the fourth, separating the second from the first and the third from the second, so as to make the meaning clear. I think it would be well, Sisters, to have a special conference, for which you need not prepare, in order to have to give some reasons spontaneously. Not that you haven=t, by God's mercy, grasped the points of the present conference, dear Sisters, and chosen motives and means that are all pertinent to the topic. That's obvious, by the grace of God. I thank Him for this with all my heart, and I ask His Divine Goodness to imprint on the heart of each one of you what has been said and what will be said at this present conference.

ASome of you have given such very good reasons, so well perceived and carefully thought out that a preacher couldn't have done better; and that can be said of all of you. Yes, all, every single one of you, Sisters, have given satisfactory motives and means, both those who have written and those who have spoken. We can say that God has enlightened all of you and that you have all discovered the secrets for fighting your enemy--other than those who weren't informed on time

to make their prayer on this, and that's my fault, because I should have told you about it sooner.

AOne of you said that it was the Will of God that Daughters of Charity should go wherever they=re sent, and she was certainly right. May God be pleased to bless her! It's God's Will that the Daughters of Charity should come and go to this parish, this village, this hospital, or any other place, without being concerned or worried about whether she'll be with this Sister or another, for a long time or for a short time. You should have no doubt, Sisters, that this is the Will of God; and, as has been so well remarked, that it's what He has willed for the Company from the time when, in His infinite goodness, He first brought it into existence. And, since it is the Will of God, which we know by the blessing He gives to the ministries to which He allows you to be called, why should anyone be unwilling to do it, or not want to do it gladly? For what should we be doing in this world but the most holy Will of God? As has been said, Our Lord came on earth only to do it. *Mon Dieu*! such a beautiful remark! May God be blessed for having given that thought to one of our Sisters, and may God bless her for having said it to us! I don't remember who mentioned it, but, whoever she is, may God be pleased to bless her!

ASo, Jesus Christ came into the world only to do the Will of His Father, and did nothing else all His life; and will a Daughter of Charity, who should model herself on Jesus Christ, want to do anything other than God's Will? >But, Monsieur,= someone will say, >what's the use of doing God's Will?= What's the use, Sister? If a soul in this world could see it, she wouldn't find difficulties enough to satisfy her; she wouldn't find anything painful enough; she wouldn't see enough trials, so much would she want to embrace them in order to do the Will of God.

AThat, dear Sisters, gives glory to God by rendering Him the submission that a creature owes its Creator and in which He finds His joy and pleasure. Yes, Sisters, it gives joy to God and He takes His delight in it. This is a truth sanctioned by Holy Scripture; so much so, that, bearing in mind the Will of God, when you hear from the mouth of your Superior that you must go to a certain place, and you adore this same divine Will, going cheerfully wherever you=ve been told, without wondering whether you'll be far from the Motherhouse or be separated from your relatives, whether you'll ever see them again, if you'll be going with a Sister for whom you have no great liking; when you surmount all that by your desire to do the Will of God, Sisters, you give joy to God, who takes His pleasure and delight in you; you give joy to the angels, who rejoice at the glory God draws from the obedience a poor creature renders to His holy Will, and you give joy to the saints, who share God's joy. Look how far that goes, Sisters: to give joy to God, to give joy to the angels, and to give joy to the saints!

AThis truth is based on Holy Scripture, which states that the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner does penance on earth.[2] And what greater penance is there than to be ready at any moment to set out and leave all to go to a place where you=ve never been, with persons you=ve never seen, leaving behind others with whom you were getting along so well! Have no doubt that the angels and saints rejoice at this.

AIf God, the angels, and the saints rejoice, the devils and the damned are, on the contrary, saddened by it, as can be proven by Holy Scripture. God points you out to the devil and says, >Look, you miserable creature, you who were unwilling to obey me, you whom I created with so many privileges and with whom I shared my glory; look at this simple Sister, who is so courageous that she makes no account of all the difficulties she'll have to face in order to obey me, nor of all the repugnances nature may suggest to her. Look, you miserable creature, and let this example also serve to confound you and add to your eternal punishment!=

ADon't we see in Job the pleasure God takes in His chosen souls and how He points them out

to Satan to increase his shame? >Do you not see my servant Job,= He says to him, >how obedient he is to my law and how he wants to please me?=[3]

ANow, Sisters, if the demons suffer additional torment from this, so do lost souls. What reproaches would God not address to a Sister from the Charity if, because she was unfaithful to her vocation, she was enduring the pains of Purgatory, and perhaps even those of hell, to satisfy the divine justice! May His Goodness not permit that! But if such a disaster did befall some of them, have no doubt that God would make known to those souls the good that you=re doing, Sisters. He says to them interiorly, >If you had not moved from there, if you had been faithful to your vocation, you would now be as pleasing to God as certain Sisters, who came long after you. They would be your daughters. Look at them, some here, some there; each glorifying God in the way of life established for her, this one in a parish, that one in the country, another in a hospital, yet another with the foundlings; and you, unfortunate woman, will be here for all eternity because you didn't follow the impulses God was giving you to do similar works! Ah! you unfortunate soul!= Your submission to the Will of God, Sisters, adds to the pain of these souls who suffer in punishment of their infidelities.

ADon't we see that those who have left your Company are languishing? They=re withering where they stand, Sisters, withering; I know that for a fact. God allows them to hear of the good which, by His mercy, is being done, and which they now see in another light than when they were listening to the temptation suggesting that they leave. That's why they make incredible efforts to return. They use the influence of Monsieur X, Madame X, Father X, and anyone else they can find among their acquaintances. They=re always secretly asking about what's going on at the Motherhouse and for news of Sisters they knew; they ask for the whereabouts of this Sister and that, and they hear that this one is in Nantes, another in Angers, another in Nanteuil, and then they say to themselves, >Alas! if I were still there, maybe I=d be in Angers, maybe in Nantes, maybe in Nanteuil.= And what you=re doing causes them remorse, which tyrannizes them and gnaws at them with displeasure. I know some who have neither property nor joy, and most of them are like that. Those who don't experience these sufferings are certainly in danger of being insensitive to the impulses of grace.

AThis should really encourage you, dear Sisters, to cherish the dispositions God has given you because, by the grace of God, I don't know if it has ever happened that a single one of you has refused to go where you were sent. No, I don't know of any. By the mercy of God, it has never come to my knowledge that a single one of you has been guilty of refusing to obey. What we=re saying is only by way of precaution and to point out to you how important it is for you to continue in the same dispositions God gave you from the beginning. And, as has been noted, it's to be feared that it would be the beginning of the ruin of your Company. And why? Because it was clear from the start, Sisters, that God wanted this of you, because He wants to be glorified by it and because the neighbor is helped by it.

AAnd how could you render to poor persons the service that, by the mercy of God, you do render them, if you never left a place! Who would go to those poor convicts? Who would nurse the sick in those villages? Who would visit those persons living in rooms and attics with no assistance? Doesn't the blessing given by God to these ministries make it clear how pleased He is with them? What would happen if a Sister should refuse to obey? By the grace of God, I don't think that has ever happened, but nothing can more surely draw down the wrath of God upon you.

AIf someone were to say, >But where's this place I'm going to? I don't know anyone; they'll

laugh at me,= the same thing would happen to her as happened to Jonah. >Go to Nineveh,= the Most High said to him, >and tell the people to do penance, or in three days Nineveh will be destroyed.= Jonah began to think to himself, >There's a King in that place who may have me maltreated; I won't be welcome if I go there to preach penance; I might even lose my life.= What does he do? He boards a ship to go elsewhere. Immediately the weather turns bad and a storm arises. To lighten the ship, the sailors decide to throw Jonah into the sea. A whale swallows him up, and holds him for three days, then spews him out alive. At that moment, Sisters, Jonah fully realized his disobedience, asked God's forgiveness for it with the greatest sorrow, and, filled with fire and faith, went off to preach in Nineveh.[4]

AYou can judge from the example of this prophet, Sisters, how angry God is with souls He has chosen to carry out His works, when they fail to obey. But who could hope for the grace He gave Jonah to get up after his fall? Alas, Sisters, don't expect it, for it's greatly to be feared that those as unfortunate as Jonah may, like him, fall to the bottom of the sea, into the belly of a whale--I mean, into sin and the incapacity to escape from it except by a remarkable miracle. And God doesn't do that every day. May the Goodness of God be pleased to preserve us from these faults!

AI know that people more than six hundred leagues away are asking for you, Sisters; I=ve had letters from them; yes, people more than six hundred leagues away are thinking of you; and if Queens[5] are requesting you there, I know other persons who are also asking for you overseas.[6] What a high opinion those Queens and those other persons must have of you, Sisters, to call for you from such a distance! This is another fresh obligation for you to work at your perfection and, above all, to acquire that detachment with which you must go.

AIt seems to me, however, that I see you already sufficiently convinced by all the aforesaid reasons, dear Sisters, in view of the most holy Will of God, in view of holy obedience, in view of the example Jesus Christ, who was obedient even to death on the Cross, has given you. He could have had millions of angels to defend Him against the rage of His enemies, He could have finished them on His own, since you see that He overturned them with a single word; yet, Sisters, He's unwilling to use this power, so greatly does He love to obey the most holy Will of His Father, and He's more content to die on the Cross to satisfy the good pleasure of God than if everything had come to His defense.

AI seem to read in your hearts the desire to imitate Him, Sisters. >But will I be going six hundred leagues away from here? Will I be going overseas?= I see clearly, dear Sisters, that you=re willing to go when obedience calls and that, even if you knew you=d never return, you wouldn't want to delay for even a moment. And I'm sure that not a single one of you hasn't already made this act of resignation in her heart. There are even some who have already done it more than six times. Yes, by the grace of God, I see all of you well disposed to do whatever it will please the Divine Goodness to ask of you, and I seem to hear you say, >Yes, my Lord Jesus Christ, with all the affection of my heart, with all the strength of my soul, I give myself entirely to You to live and to die in obedience as You willed to live and die by obeying, whether I'm sent to this place or that, or called back here to be sent somewhere else. It will be all the same to me, my God, whether for a short time or a long time, whether to live there or die there. I'm content with whatever You permit, and I won't worry about what could happen, provided it pleases you, my God, to grant me the grace of obeying all my life for love of You.=

AThe resolution all of you are now making, dear Sisters, I am also making, and I firmly hope that God in His goodness will grant me the grace to render to my Superiors the obedience I owe

them. I firmly hope for this, please God. Wretched man that I am, I have good reason to regret having failed in it. *Eh bien*! blessed be God!

AWhat we have to do now, Sisters, is to find some means of making sure that these weaknesses and thoughtlessness, which can come even to the most virtuous persons, don't prompt you to want to be separated from the Sister with whom God has permitted you to reside, on the pretext that the two of you don't get along very well, or that she's not exact in following her Rules, or that you want to ask to be changed because you=re not happy there (because of some Lady or some confessor!). *Mon Dieu*! Sisters, pay no attention to that, for it would trouble your peace of mind. Oh no! never listen to that!

ASo, Sisters, I won't try to find any means other than the ones you yourselves have given, because, by God's grace, I see none that are more effective. The first is to ask earnestly for the grace of God, for who could promise herself to advance a single step on the path of virtue, Sisters, if God doesn't place us on it first and guide us on the way? That's a truth guaranteed by the Gospel. >No one,= says Our Lord, >comes to me, if my Father does not draw him.=[7] Now, to obtain this grace from the Goodness of God, Sisters, it's only right that we should ask for it. So this will be one of the principal means you'll use; and, if you take my word, you won't miss a day without doing it. Ask for it earnestly; ask for it insistently; ask for it humbly; and, above all, ask for it with a great desire to obtain it, recognizing and admitting that without it you'll never take a step on the path of virtue. We delude and deceive ourselves if we think we can do anything on our own. Experience teaches us this only too well. We feel nature complaining, we feel a repugnance for this, an aversion for that, and sometimes a distaste for everything. Alas! if God didn't come to our rescue, what would we do! So, Sisters, I can't recommend this practice enough to you. But I hope that, since God has led you to understand how helpful it is, He'll give you the grace to adopt it.

AAnother means--which you=ve also mentioned--is to believe that we=re the ones at fault in the little confrontations that sometimes trouble our hearts. If you=re dissatisfied with your Sister, think about your own conduct: >But isn't it I who have given her reason for being in this mood?= Put yourself in her place and take a good look. If someone answered me as rudely as I answered her, wouldn't I resent it? Believe me, Sisters, God is the one who has led you to discover that this is one of the most effective means for preserving charity among yourselves because, if you consider your neighbor in the same light as you would like to be considered, you'll never think that she's wrong; on the contrary, she'll always seem to you to be right.

A >But what should be done when the person is so annoying that everything we do annoys her, Monsieur?= Sister, in the first place see whether or not you=ve given her cause to be annoyed, and whether you haven't given her reason to be more annoyed with you than you are with her, and say, >Alas! this Sister must be very good since Our Lord is trying her in this way; no doubt He wants to sanctify her by patience.= But don't ever say, >This Sister is annoying; she's so discontented! Nothing I can do pleases her,= because, first of all, you'll destroy charity between you, for there's nothing that cools it so much as contemptuous expressions.

AIn the places where you are, you won't produce the good results God wants you to bring about there, for, from the moment you no longer have the spirit of charity, there are no more question of good works. You'll lose your reputation of being Daughters of God, for charity is nothing other than God, and whoever says Daughters of Charity says daughters of God. What would the people who are expecting help from you say, and what would the Queens who are waiting for you say, if they no longer saw in you the spirit of God? So, preserve this spirit of

God, Sisters, this spirit of charity and mutual support, which will always cause you to take the blame for everything and not put it on your Sister. Love one another with a heartfelt love and, since all of you are of only one mind, then be all of one heart as well. I'm not saying that you=re to love one another with that sensual love that consists in I don't know what sort of satisfaction, Sisters; I don't mean with that evil love with which the wicked love the wicked, but with the love God wants us to have for one another and has its principle in Him.

AFeeling a certain natural repugnance at going far away or being with one person rather than another, Sisters, doesn't mean that you don't have the right disposition, provided it's only in your feeling but you don't consent to it and, as soon as you do feel it, that you go for the remedy, that is, to the foot of the Cross, to address your complaint lovingly to Our Lord, saying, >My God, You see how weak I am and how powerless to control myself and my passions. Please help me not to do anything contrary to Your Will; give me the strength, my God, not to give in.=

ABe very careful, Sisters, not to let your Sister see that you=re upset with her. Always live in peace. If, however, things don't calm down, Sisters, you can tell your troubles to your Superiors, but with submission, ready to do whatever they tell you, as coming from God. You can say to them, >I find it hard to go to such a place or to do such a thing; nevertheless, I'll still go, if you think fit.= And let me tell you, Sisters, allow yourselves to be guided. You'll experience the blessings God gives to submission. But if that should last for a month or two--even three or four--you shouldn't be upset by it, provided God and your Superiors are aware of it, for souls accept orders in diverse ways: some joyfully, others indifferently, and others with great difficulty. The ones who accept them with great joy are filled with the Spirit of God; they welcome difficulties and take their delight in them. These are gentle souls to whom God has given, together with His Spirit, fullness of peace, as a reward for the difficulties they=ve previously overcome. These souls, I repeat, dear Sisters, instead of experiencing any repugnance, are filled with consolation in the most trying circumstances, and rejoice to accept the most difficult proposals made to them. Lack of comfort, remoteness, any sort of companionship--and death itself, if it should come to them--are all the same to them in the sight of God because they are filled with God.

AOther souls also receive with pleasure the news that they are being sent to far off places, but from a motive quite contrary to that of the former, for it's because they'll be far removed from someone they dislike, or because they'll have greater freedom than at the Motherhouse, or because people will have a high opinion of them, talk about them and say, >That Sister has gone to such and such a place, to such and such a house. They must really appreciate her!= Let's be on our guard against this dangerous poison, Sisters, and strenuously reject these pernicious thoughts that would ruin all of us.

AFifteen or sixteen years ago a great nobleman of the court was condemned to be beheaded. A holy person was chosen to assist him to die. This person was Fr. de Condren,[8] General of the Oratorians, a man who had the spirit of God. He was told that this nobleman was the most resolute, the best prepared to die, the most generous, and the bravest man alive, and that he was going to his death as cheerfully as to battle. Now, this holy man who had vast experience and excellent judgment, was afraid that the nobleman was acting that way for the wrong reason, namely, vanity, so that he wouldn't appear to be a coward in his passage from this life, and to have people speak of his courage after his death. He went to see him and, finding him so determined, began to assail him with the fear of death. >Do you realize, Monsieur,= he said to him, >that you=re going to die in two hours and that you'll have to appear before God and give an account of the many souls you=ve sent to hell? Fifteen or twenty men, whom you=ve slain in

duels, and most of whom died without confession, are crying out to God for justice. And how do you know whether you'll be eternally damned with them? It's God you=re dealing with, Monsieur; think carefully about that; very little time remains; you must spend it well.=

AThese words and a few others that this good priest addressed to the unfortunate nobleman gripped him with fear. He was disconcerted and no longer knew what to do. He was heartily sorry for the evil he had done. He feared the judgment of God, and when that holy man saw him in this state, he shored up his courage with the following words: >It's true that you can't be too sorry for the evil you=ve done, Monsieur, but I assure you on the part of God that, if you really and truly repent, if you accept death in satisfaction for your sins, they will be forgiven.= So, he was reassured and full of confidence. The good priest then made him acknowledge that his courage was due to vanity alone and a desire to acquire a reputation.

ANow, God forbid, Sisters, that you should act from such a motive! I hope that God in His goodness will preserve you from that. I entreat Him to do so with all my heart, and also to deign to give us the dispositions necessary for the accomplishment of His holy Will for our entire lives, in every place and with anyone whomsoever. I ask that, in His infinite mercy, He will deign to forgive all of us the faults we=ve committed against holy obedience and to accept the resolution we=re taking to live and die under obedience for love of Him. I make the same resolution for myself and, with the grace of God, I hope to be faithful to it, obeying my Superiors meticulously. This is the resolution you are now making, Sisters, and I pray with all my heart that God may graciously accept it. With this confidence, I will now pronounce the words of blessing on you. At the same time I'm pronouncing them, may God be pleased to send you the strength of His Spirit by the power of His word!

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

44. - OBEDIENCE

August 7, 1650

ASisters, the subject of this conference is obedience. The first point deals with the reasons we have for this obedience; the second, the conditions necessary for true obedience, and the third, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions. So that's the subject, Sisters: holy obedience; a great virtue and a great topic for us to discuss; a great, great virtue! Please tell us your thoughts on it, Sister.@

After the Sister had spoken, Most Honored Father said to her, ASo, Sister, you=re determined to acquire the virtue of obedience! That's very fine indeed! May God be ever blessed and praised!

AAnd you, Sister?@

AOn the first point, the reasons why we should have the virtue of obedience, I thought in the first place that it was to please God; second, to imitate His Son who gave us the example while He was on earth. And since He had no other intention than to please God, we must do the same in all our works.

AOn the second point, the conditions for true obedience, I thought that the first one was to obey of our own free will and not out of constraint; and simply, without asking why we are being ordered to do such or such a thing.

AOn the third point, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions, I thought it was necessary to obey humbly, without any argument, and perseveringly, without asking questions. I have resolved, therefore, to submit to whatever it pleases God to have my Superiors

order me to do.@

Another Sister recalled the example of Jesus Christ in the matter of voluntary obedience and added that this virtue should be blind.

AAnd you, Sister,@ said our worthy Father, turning to another Sister, Aplease tell me why Daughters of Charity should work at acquiring the virtue of obedience.@

ABecause nuns have cloisters, Monsieur, but we don=t; and if obedience didn't restrain us, we=d be in danger of committing many faults.@

A*Mon Dieu*! that's well said! That's very well said, indeed! So, Sister, do you think obedience should restrain you as much as cloisters restrain nuns?@ The Sister answered that she did, adding that, even though we=re not enclosed, we=re no less obliged to be obedient than nuns.

AIn that way, Sisters, obedience serves you as walls. How beautiful that is! A Sister will nurse sick persons in a parish. If she were her own mistress, she=d have no problem going now to this place, now to another, to the home of a Lady she knows or to a relative, or of lingering longer than her work requires in places where she is called to minister. Holy obedience keeps her from all that; she goes simply where the work demands, and wastes no time in useless visits. Isn't that what you mean, Sister, when you say that nuns have cloisters but Daughters of Charity have only obedience? Do you think that a Daughter of Charity who observes obedience exactly does just as well as a nun in her cloister?@

The Sister said yes, and M. Vincent went on, AYes, Sisters, you can be certain of that. If there's anything beautiful to see, anything that's pleasing to God, and admirable in the eyes of angels and humans; if there's a phenomenon worthy of amazement, it's to see Sisters living on their own in a room, who seem, in the judgment of those who don't know them, to be doing as they please, but in reality are so submissive that it may be said that they never do their own will because they do nothing except by holy obedience. No, dear Sisters, you can rest assured that nuns, confined their entire lives within their cloisters, do no more than you, if you=re obedient, and that what you do by this virtue is so great that it would be hard to find anything greater.

AWhat means should you use to acquire this virtue of obedience, Sister?@ When the Sister had answered that we should obey Superiors as we would God, Most Honored Father continued, ASo then, Sister, you think that when a Sister says something to us it's God who is saying it to us through her?@

AYes,@ she replied.

AAnd if it's the Sister Servant who gives the order, and we find it hard to obey, thinking that it would be done better in some other way, should we refrain from obeying?@

ANo,@ said the Sister.

ABut if the Sister Servant is younger and a more recent arrival than you, wouldn't it be better to follow the knowledge and experience you have than to do what she advises?@ To this the Sister replied that she felt it was more meritorious to listen to the Sister Servant.

AYou=re quite right, Sister! and you need have no doubt about it; take my word that what God orders you by your Superiors for love of Him will never fail to be for His greater glory.

AAnd you, Sister, do you think it's necessary for a Daughter of Charity to be obedient?@

AYes, it is.@

AWhy do you think so, Sister?@

ABecause the Son of God has given us the example.@

AWhen did He do that, Sister?@

AWhen He came on earth.@

AAnd how long did He obey?@

AUntil His death.@

AYou said it well. Yes, He obeyed even to death, and to death on the Cross, which wasn't a common, ordinary form of death, but the most painful and ignominious of all. For what other reason do you think a Daughter of Charity should obey?@

ABecause God orders it.@

AThat's an excellent reason; God has ordered that we obey, and if anyone should do what God has ordered it's the Daughters of Charity.

To understand clearly the importance of obeying, Sisters, you have to consider that two kinds of merit are entailed in obeying. The first is the merit of the work you=re doing, which is good in itself; the second is the merit of the obedience with which you do the work. For example, you serve the sick, which is a good work and very meritorious in itself. If you weren't obliged to do it through obedience, you=d have only the merit of the work; if you serve them through obedience, you have double merit: that of the work and that of obedience. If possible, we should always desire to act through obedience. Imagine, Sisters, that for works done through obedience, the same holds true as for a picture that may be worth ten écus for what it is in itself, but because it's from the hand of a great master, such as Michelangelo, or some other highly-respected artist, its value doubles; and, instead of the ten écus it would be worth, it's now worth twenty. These works are also like the vestments used at Mass; you see beautiful linen, gleaming white, carefully folded, with a pleasing scent. That's lovely. But because this linen is to be used at Holy Mass, it's of far greater value. So, if we do a work that's good in itself we merit from the goodness of the work, but if we do it out of obedience, we have double merit. Actions indifferent in themselves, having no value of their own, are made meritorious by obedience. If a Sister knew the real meaning of obedience she=d never do anything until after she had asked the Sister Servant: >Sister, would you like me to do this?= I'm speaking not only of matters of importance but of others as well. The Sister Servant herself should never do anything until she has consulted her companion: >Sister, do you think it would be a good idea for us to do this?=

AThat's how you should act with one another, dear Sisters; and, by the mercy of God, I think you do; for, no doubt the Sister never undertakes anything without permission of the Sister Servant, and the latter is very careful never to order her Sister to do anything by saying, for instance, >Go there; do that.= *O Jésus*! don't do that, for that would be to speak like mistresses to their servants. But when she has something to ask, she should say, >Sister, would you kindly do this?= Never any categorical command. Please remember that, Sisters, and speak to one another only gently and graciously.

ACan you tell us, Sister, why Daughters of Charity should practice obedience?@ The Sister replied that a Community couldn't subsist without obedience. AWhat a good reason, Sisters! A Community couldn't subsist if obedience weren't observed in it, says our Sister. How true that is! Alas! what desolation would there be? You can't imagine. Each one would start giving orders, and not a single one would take the trouble to obey. To understand this, picture to yourself what would happen to a body whose arms and feet, the members best fitted for action, were unwilling to be attached to it. Nothing would be more ridiculous; they=d leave the body crippled, and they themselves would perhaps hasten their own decay because, detached from the body, they=d be fit for nothing but to be buried in the ground. It would be the same for a Community where obedience wouldn't be observed. The Superioress who lacked the virtue of

obedience to the point or in the manner required, and the Sisters who wouldn't practice it, would dismember one another. Good-bye to the poor Community where there's no obedience; nothing can be maintained. That's why our Sister was perfectly correct--or rather truly inspired--because, without doubt, it was God who has suggested to you what you are saying.

AAnd for what further reason do you think it's well to obey, Sister?@

ATo imitate the Son of God.@

ATo what point did He obey, Sister?@

AUnto death.@

ASo, Sister, you think that those who wish to follow Him should obey unto death?@

AYes, Father.@

AFor young people, there's nothing better; but can't an older Sister be dispensed from obedience? Isn't it enough that she obeyed when she was a Sister companion? Now that she's a Sister Servant, is she still subject to it?@

AYes, she is,@ replied the Sister.

AAnd shouldn't an older Sister who finds herself living with someone younger and less experienced than herself think that she should be the Sister Servant?@ The answer was in the negative, and Most Honored Father went on, AOh no, dear Sisters! just because you=re old don't think that it's ever permissible to make any claims. Never, Sisters, never; please put that out of your minds; never claim anything on account of seniority. *Quoi*! because you=re older and have been in the Company a long time; because you know more about what should be done in hospitals, parishes, and in the country, you should be dispensed from holy obedience and from a more exact observance of the virtues? No, Sisters! that would be an abuse. Instead of giving greater example of virtue to others, the older Sisters would be a source of disedification.

ATell me, Sister, do you think a Sister should be just as obedient in sickness as in health? Yes, she should, Sisters; and don't think there's any time when she may be dispensed from obeying. And should she obey the physician?@

AYes,@ said the Sister.

AYes, Sister, she must obey the physician, and in everything, not picking and choosing among the remedies prescribed for her, or taking those she likes and refusing those she finds repugnant. But if the Sister Servant is ill and another Sister tells her how she should care for herself, does she have to obey, if she herself judges it advisable to act differently? I remember meeting a Counselor, who never did anything without consulting his footman. If he wanted to go somewhere, he=d call him and say, >Come here, brother; do you think we should go to such a place or do such a thing?= Sometimes the young man didn't know what to reply and would say: >I don't know, Monsieur,= [but the other would say,] >I want you to answer me yes or no.= Then the footman would give his opinion, and the master would follow it. I have no doubt that this man was doing the Will of God by doing the will of his footman for the love of God, and he had the merit of obedience to the divine virtue that divinizes people. It's a light that sheds its brightness on the souls disposed to receive it and dazzles by its splendor the eyes of those who see it and who begin immediately to admire its beauty.

AIf you give yourselves once and for all to the practice of this virtue, Sisters, you'll be more resplendent than the sun of suns; the same will hold true of your Company as of pictures of the saints. Haven't you sometimes seen pictures in which saints are represented in a brilliant light, like sunbeams. That's delightful, and even before you stop to consider what this is, you=ve

already said to yourself >that's a saint= because you=ve seen the light radiating from the person. In the same way, Sisters, when the virtue of obedience is apparent in each of you, it will immediately cause those who see you to say that you=re servants of God, so true is it that virtue comes to the fore wherever it is. And not only Christians but even pagans thought it so beautiful that they were quite enchanted with it and made greater efforts to acquire it than we might do to acquire the Christian virtues (it was the only moral virtue they knew of at the time). Let's not have less admiration for it than the pagans did. So, dear Sisters, let's give ourselves to God, I say, not tomorrow but beginning right now, from this very moment--and I don't mean only you, but I'm speaking for myself because I have as much or even greater need of it than you. So let's give ourselves, I repeat, with all our heart, to work earnestly to acquire this beautiful, amiable virtue, so well loved by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

AYou made a very good remark, Sister, in saying that a Community would go to rack and ruin without obedience. Nothing is more true, and we=ve already said so just now. Moreover, there isn't a single well-regulated Community in which it isn't strictly observed. This applies not only to religious Communities but also to the army. Should a captain command a soldier to be the first to mount the breach, to act as a lookout over a passage where he runs a great risk of encountering the enemy and of being the weaker party, he'll never refuse. No matter what man in his company the captain orders to do this, he'll be obeyed immediately. No soldier has yet been known to refuse, although frequently the danger may have been obvious. No, not a single one has ever refused. That's admirable. I sometimes ask them, >But when you see inevitable danger, don't you give some good reasons for not going?= >Oh no, Monsieur!= they tell me, >that has never happened.= If disobedience were to creep into the army, then good-bye to all the rest of order in warfare; it would no longer exist. The same would happen to Companies committed to God's service, Sisters; if obedience is absent, then good-bye to all order; that's the end of it.

ANow, tell me, Sister, what is the virtue of obedience?@

AIt's doing what we=re ordered to do.@

AIt certainly is that, Sister, but when you=re asked what is the virtue of obedience, you should say that it's a virtue by which we submit our judgment and will to the judgment and will of our Superior to approve and carry out whatever he may think fitting to order us to do, without finding any fault in it. If a feast day occurs, which a Sister in a parish did not foresee, may she go to Communion, even though she hasn't asked permission?@ The Sister didn't know what to reply. AOh no, Sister! she mustn't do it; you must never receive Communion without permission.

AA Sister obeys willingly, but only when given orders by Mademoiselle or someone she likes but not by her Sister Servant; is she obedient, Sister? Oh no, definitely not, because true obedience makes no exception of persons.

AAnd would the Sister who obeys in something that pleases her, but not in something that doesn=t, have the virtue of obedience? No, she wouldn't be obeying either and would have no merit. But if, in order not to contradict her Superioress or to fail in the respect due to her, a Sister showed that she was ready to do what was asked of her but didn't do it, would she be disobeying? Yes, dear Sisters, she=d be disobedient, and in a way very harmful to the Company, letting it be seen that she prefers her own judgment to that of the Superioress. And supposing the Superioress ordered something that might be a sin, should she do it? No, she shouldn=t, Sister, because our Superiors can't oblige us to do anything sinful.

ASupposing what she ordered was contrary to the Rule, what should be done?@

AI think it should be pointed out to her, Monsieur, and, if she persisted, her order should be carried out.@

AThat's very well thought out, Sister, for sometimes Superiors alter certain circumstances for good reasons, without, however, changing the matter completely; in such a case, because of the zeal each of you should have for the observance of Rule, it's a good idea to point out humbly and quite simply that the order seems contrary to the Rule on that point. Then, it's up to the Superioress to see if the thing is necessary. We must be extremely cautious on this point. There are two kinds of obedience: one to the Rules and the other to Superiors. Obedience to the Rule should always take first place and be preferred; if Superiors were to give an order directly contrary to the Rules, they shouldn't be obeyed and would be blameworthy. Each of you must be exact to this obedience and not allow any delay. If the bell rings for an exercise, leave everything. Our progress in the spiritual life depends on this obedience to Rule. Obedience to Superiors must be so faithful and entire that, if we knew for certain that, by doing the contrary of what they said, things would go better and they themselves wouldn't disapprove, such thoughts should still be rejected; they=re diabolical and are prompted by the spirit of pride and presumption.

ASo, Sister, how many kinds of obedience are there?@

AThere are two; one to the Rules and the other to Superiors.@

AWell now, Sister, a Sister who goes to Mass after asking permission has double merit: the merit of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass--the most excellent work in Christendom--and that of obedience, habitual obedience to the Rule that ordains it, and actual obedience to the Superioress of whom she has asked the permission.

AAnd whom does a Sister obey when she kneels down before leaving the house?@

AShe obeys the Rule.@

AAnd if she didn't obey it, would she sin?@

ANo, Monsieur, but she=d deprive herself of the merit of obedience.@

ASo then, Sister, you think it's meritorious to obey?@

AYes, I do, Monsieur.@

AYes, it is, Sisters, and it's such that if you and I appreciated it properly we=d never, in the entire course of our lives, want to perform any action, however unimportant it might seem, except from obedience. You have this in your power, Sisters. And what a degree of virtue you can attain if you devote yourselves wholeheartedly to practice it! I tell you, Sisters, as long as the Company continues in the way God has given it the grace to begin, no nun on earth will do better than you. Each and every one of you can give more glory to God and greater service to your neighbor and work harder at your own perfection than any nun on earth.

APlease tell us the thoughts with which God graciously inspired you, Sister.@

AThe first reason I saw is that, when we enter the Company, we place ourselves voluntarily under the guidance of a Superioress; from then on we=re obliged to live under obedience. A second reason is that it's impossible to remain in the Company without this virtue; we=d gradually begin to grow lax in our exercises, find the orders of our Superiors wearisome, and be a source of scandal to all our Sisters. Superiors would then be forced to send us away, or we ourselves would be prompted to withdraw, for we=d no longer be able to endure our own failings, imagining that everyone was watching us, that we were a burden to them, and a thousand similar thoughts. In the end we=d have to give up everything. Another reason is that, since we have no other model in the Company than the Son of God, we=re obliged to work at

acquiring the virtues that were most resplendent in His life, and obedience holds the first place among all of them because He began to obey from the time of His Incarnation until His death on the Cross.

AOn the second point, the conditions of true obedience, I thought that it must be humble, patient, prompt, joyous, and persevering and that we should have the same will and judgment as those who give us orders, and equally towards all of them, without considering to whom we=re submitting, recognizing the right of everyone to command us.

AOn the third point, the means of acquiring this virtue with all its conditions, the first is to ask it often of God; the second, always to see God in the person of those to whom we=re subject; the third, to set ourselves the task of acquiring this virtue until God gives us the grace to do so; to make frequent interior acts of submission of our judgment and will and, beginning in the morning, to foresee occasions of doing so; to make our particular examination of conscience on it and to impose some penance on ourselves when we fail; and to renew our resolutions with confidence in God. I recognized how greatly I need this virtue. That's why I resolved, with the grace of God, to use these means. Nevertheless, I=ve been so remiss that, since the day I made that resolution, I failed again in obedience on an occasion that presented itself. For this I very humbly ask pardon of you, Father, and of Mademoiselle and all our Sisters.@

AGet up, Sister, Get up. Blessed be God and blessed be the thoughts He has given you and the resolutions He has led you to make! You said very rightly, Sister, that it would be impossible to remain in the Company without obedience. That has already been mentioned several times, but it seems to me that we can't ponder it enough.

AAnd you, Sister, please tell us what was the most resplendent virtue in the Son of God.@

AI think it was obedience, Father.@

AYes, Sister, holy obedience. He had all the virtues to a sovereign degree, but He loved obedience above all.

AWhom should we obey, Sister? Whom should Daughters of Charity obey?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that they should obey God first of all, then their Rules, Superiors, and the Lady Officers in the parishes where they are.@

AThat's well stated. You see, Sisters, the Ladies have to be obeyed in whatever concerns the service of the sick, provided they don't tell you to do anything contrary to your Rules. You owe them that, with all respect and submission. They=re the ones who employ you and give you the means of rendering the service you render to God. If they ask you to do something forbidden by your Rules, then you must excuse yourselves frankly and in such a way as not to vex them; I'm sure they won't be annoyed, if you speak to them humbly and gently.

AAnd when a parish Sister wants to go to Communion but doesn't have permission, what should she do, Sister?@

AI think she must refrain from going, as has been said, Father.@

AYes, Sister, never go to Communion without permission. No doubt, when you live far away, you can't come to ask for it each time, but you have to get instructions beforehand for the whole time you=re away. If some feast of special devotion occurs, on which you know the Community doesn't receive Communion, then you mustn't do so either. With us, if a priest recited an Office different from the one ordered by the Church, that would be wrong. If a person is attached to reciting the Office of a certain saint, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Holy Cross, etc., it doesn't matter, he must submit to what the Church orders and not change it in any way whatsoever. Neither is it allowed to add something to the Office. I'm telling you this, Sisters, to help you to

understand how important it is always to conform to what the Community is doing.

AThere would be nothing more beautiful in the world, Sister, than the Company of the Daughters of Charity, if it were so uniform that, no matter where it was established, nothing would be done that was not in conformity with what is practiced in this house, and obedience was in effect everywhere, with the Sister Servant being the first to obey, to ask advice, and to submit to others. No, take my word for it, Sisters, I don't think there's anything in the world more beautiful and more edifying.

AAnd you, Sister, will you tell us some of your thoughts?@

AOn the first point, Father, I thought that the primary reason for acquiring the virtue of obedience is that the first man lost all the other virtues by the sin of disobedience, and that all Christians are obliged to practice this virtue in order to be saved. This is clear from the fact that God has given us commandments which must be obeyed if we don't want to be damned. The second reason is that Our Lord has given us the example, for He came on earth, accomplished our redemption, and appeased the anger of God by His obedience. The third is that, besides the obedience God wills from all Christians, He asks for a more definite, particular obedience from those He has called to serve Him, without which we couldn't be saved. A fourth is that, in our state of life, we could have no interior peace without obedience.@

AOur Sister has mentioned two powerful reasons, Sisters; and I'm going to repeat them so that they'll remain in your minds. One is that the Son of God appeased the wrath of God His Father by obedience, and by this means accomplished the work of our salvation. *Mon Dieu*! that's beautiful, and who can refuse to obey if she reflects on these truths? The other compelling reason, in addition to the ones our Sister gave, is that a Sister who wasn't obedient wouldn't have interior peace. No, Sisters, she=d never have it; there's never peace where there's no obedience, so don't expect it; there's continual unrest, making people anxious and unbearable to themselves. Please continue, Sister.@

AOn the second point, the principal condition necessary for true obedience is submission of the judgment and the will; the second is perseverance, in imitation of the Son of God, who was obedient unto death on the Cross. The first means of acquiring this virtue is to ask it earnestly from Jesus Christ--the kind He himself had, both in regard to God His Father in all that concerned our salvation, and His holy Mother and Saint Joseph in what concerned the conduct of His life while He was subject to them. The second means is to practice it on all occasions that arise, for nothing makes it easier than to make frequent acts of it.@

AThat's the only way, Sisters: to ask Jesus Christ for this virtue. That's its source. Never, never, Sisters, will you obtain obedience except in that way. But what do you mean by *acts*, Sister? A little while ago someone said that we should make interior acts. Is that what you mean, or do you want to speak of the works themselves?@ The Sister replied that interior acts were the desire to practice the virtue when we have the opportunity, and that by *acts* she meant obeying when the occasion arose, neglecting no opportunity of doing so.

Most Honored Father questioned another Sister, who repeated what others had said. Then he questioned Mademoiselle, who replied, AThe first reason that came to my mind is that, in creating the world, God subjected all creatures to obedience. It seems, therefore, that only rational creatures have contravened this, which really obliges us to love and practice the virtue of obedience.

AAnother reason is that disobedience has always been so displeasing to God that, since it was man who introduced it, it was necessary for one of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity to

become man to make amends for the fault--not only to let us see by His acts of obedience how reasonable it is for us to obey, but also that our imperfect acts of obedience, by being united to those of the Son of God, may have the merit of His. This is a strong reason to acquire and practice the virtue of obedience.

AA third reason is that, without obedience, there would be continual disorder in every family, especially in Communities, and even greater among the Daughters of Charity because of the freedom their custom gives them to go to various places, and because of the interior and exterior disturbance disobedience would cause them.

AOne of the means that I thought could help me to have the virtue of obedience in the way God asks it is, in my opinion, to have a high regard for it, often calling to mind the obedience of the Son of God in things that are painful and difficult for us, reflecting that He willed to observe it unto death to serve as an example and encouragement to us.

AAnother means I hope to make use of is to be on the alert for opportunities of practicing obedience. If I'm not fortunate enough to have them often in my daily actions, I thought that, when I give orders or advice to the persons to whom I'm obligated to do so by my office, it's because I have been commanded to do so by the Will of God expressed to me by my Superiors.

AAs for matters of minor importance, I'll try, with the help of God's grace, to defer and acquiesce more humbly to those who demand something of me, provided I can do so without offending God. And because obedience may be observed in various ways, it seemed to me that, if it is to be in the way God asks of me, it was imperative to obey with great simplicity and humility.

ASecond, we must obey those who have a right to give us orders, without making any distinction of persons, as if it were God commanding us, since it's for love of Him that we must obey and in order to do His holy Will.

AA third condition of true obedience is to do nothing to influence our Superiors to tell us to do what we desire, but to try to have them order us what they know God wants of us.

AIn the fourth place, I think obedience must be prompt and unquestioning, with submission of our own judgment and fidelity to the practice of what we=re ordered to do. To my mind, it will be a great help to us if we accustom ourselves not to be opinionated and to yield to all sorts of persons, even in trifling matters.

AI=ve been deeply ashamed, seeing how often I=ve failed in all those practices through my arrogance and obstinacy. I'm sorry for this and ask pardon of all my Sisters who may have remarked it.@

AWell, dear Sisters, it seems to me that you=re all filled with respect for this virtue; you=re convinced that your Company, which is so pleasing to God for what it does and the ministries to which it devotes itself, will also receive an increase of merit that cannot be imagined, if it does them virtuously and for the love of holy obedience. That's why I think all of you are filled with the desire to devote yourselves to it and to give yourselves now to God never to do anything contrary to it. With my whole heart I bless and praise His Divine Goodness for all the inspirations He has given you: the reasons why it's just and necessary to obey, the conditions that must accompany true obedience, and the appropriate means and resolutions for putting it into practice. I entreat Our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all graces are given to us, to obtain for us from the Eternal Father an obedience like He himself had, to make up by the infinite merits of His obedience for the deficiencies that are in ours, to be pleased that all of you here present may be faithful and exact in carrying out the inspirations He'll send you by His Holy Spirit, to make

the grace He has given you fruitful, to communicate it through you to our absent Sisters, and through you and them to those who come after you, so that, when they hear of the obedience that was practiced in the Company, they may feel bound to continue it. I ask this of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I entreat it of the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name I, although a miserable sinner, supported by its infinite mercy, shall not refrain from pronouncing the words of blessing. A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

45. - TO SOME SISTERS BEING SENT TO THE COUNTRY

October 22, 1650

ADear Sisters, one of the principal virtues you must possess is humility; yes, Sisters, maintain great humility. Consider yourselves the least of everyone; remember that you=re servants of the poor; regard them as your masters and serve them with great gentleness and humility.

AThe second thing you must have, Sisters, is charity--great charity with everyone.

AThe third thing, dear Sisters--and I recommend it above all--is mutual support; yes, Sisters, great support. Never do anything to displease one another, Sisters, never; and for that purpose, acquiesce to one another and ask each another's advice. The Sister Servant must consult her Sister: >Shall we go there, Sister? Shall we do that?= And if the Sister replies, >I think that would be a good idea, Sister,= then do it. >But,= you'll say to me, >must the Sister Servant consult and give in to her Sister?= Yes, she certainly must; yes, she has to do it; she must yield in everything and be the most humble, but she has to hold her own if her Sister should want to do anything contrary to God and the Rules; she must stand fast. The Sister Servant must also do nothing without informing her Sister, and have great respect for her.

ASo bear with one another, dear Sisters, when any slight misunderstandings arise among you--for they will arise. Give yourselves to God for that intention, beginning right now, for there's no one who doesn't commit some fault. What seems to us to be a fault in our Sister may not always be one. Sometimes we=re the ones who aren't in the right mood to agree with what our Sister is doing; it's not what we expected, and that annoys us. Let's not be surprised at finding it hard to bear with others, Sisters, since at times we can't stand ourselves. What pleases us today displeases us tomorrow; we=re never in the same state; we want something and then we don't want it. We=re disagreeable to ourselves. If something happens to annoy you, Sisters, excuse one another and think, >It's because I'm not in a good mood. It's not that my Sister has done anything wrong; I'm the one who isn't humble and can't even stand myself.= Lastly, Sisters, if you=ve given one another any cause for displeasure, ask forgiveness for it as soon as possible, and both of you kneel down and say, >*Mon Dieu*! Sister, I=ve given you some reason for being displeased; I ask your pardon for it.= The other Sister should reply, >Sister, I'm the one who asks yours.= By so doing, you'll preserve union among you. Please don't fail in this, Sisters.

ASo, then, take great care to instruct those poor people, Sisters; teach them how to die well. What a consolation to help those good people get to heaven! Yes indeed, you'll be leading them to heaven. As for your pupils, you'll be teaching them to serve God well. You'll do great things if you=re faithful to God, Sisters. In connection with this, I have to tell you what dear Mme Goussault, who was a great servant of God (she was a saint, Sisters; she loved your Company dearly), said to me the night before she died: >Monsieur, I=ve been very much absorbed with God tonight, and I=ve seen a Daughter of Charity before Him. What great things they'll do, Monsieur!= How happy you'll be, Sisters, if God is glorified by your actions. Yes indeed, He'll be glorified by them if you work for love of Him.

ADon’t waste your time ingratiating yourselves with persons of the upper class, paying them compliments and acting like Ladies of the court. *O mon Dieu*! no, no, don’t do that; all would be lost, Sisters. *O mon Dieu*! avoid that carefully.

So, you’ll be going to visit certain persons, dear Sisters, and if you=re taken to see the Bishop of the area, ask for his blessing; tell him you want to live entirely under obedience to him, that you give yourselves entirely to him for the service of the poor, and that you=ve been sent for that purpose. If he asks you who you are and whether you=re nuns, tell him that you=re not, by the grace of God--not that you don’t have a high opinion of nuns, but that, if you were nuns, you=d have to be enclosed; consequently, you=d have to say good-bye to the service of the poor. Tell him that you=re poor Daughters of Charity, who have given yourselves to God for the service of the poor, that it’s permitted for you to withdraw, and that you may also be dismissed.

AIf he asks you, >Do you make religious vows?= tell him, >Oh no, Monsieur! we give ourselves to God to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience, some of us forever, and others for a year.=

ALastly, dear Sisters, give yourselves totally to God to do well what you=re going to do. Ask Him for the spirit of His Son so that you may be able to perform all your actions as He did His, Sisters, because you have the happiness of imitating the life that the Son of God led with His Apostles on earth. I ask Him, Sisters, to be pleased to fill you with His spirit and to give you the graces necessary for you to be true Daughters of Charity. This is what I beseech Him to do with all my heart and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

Afterward, a Sister Servant asked, AFather, I beg you to order my Sister to remind me of my faults whenever I fail.@

AYes, Sister, willingly, but we shouldn’t admonish someone on every occasion because what we think is a fault may perhaps not be one; we should make our prayer on this beforehand and ask ourselves, >Is what my Sister has done a serious fault?= And if we see that it isn=t, then say nothing. It’s not important; it gives bad example to no one; so, ignore it. But, if God lets us see in prayer that it’s a serious fault, then attention must be called to it. However, do you know how this must be done? You should kneel down and say, >Sister, I think you=re willing to allow me to remind you of this fault so that you’ll be careful about it.= That’s how you should act, dear Sisters. I recommend myself to your prayers.@

46. - THE VIRTUES OF SISTERS ANNE DE GENNES, MARIE LULLEN,<R>MARGUERITE BOSSU, AND CÉCILE DELAÎTRE[1]

December 9[2]

The first of our Sisters mentioned at this conference was Sister Anne de Gennes. She was of noble birth and left everything to give herself to God in the Company of the poor Daughters of Charity, in which she had the happiness to persevere until death. One of our Sisters who had lived with her said that Sister de Gennes was chagrined whenever anyone spoke to her of her noble birth, that it mortified her, and she couldn’t endure it.

AAh! Sisters,@ said M. Vincent, Awhat virtue not to seek esteem and not to want people to speak of her family! That good Sister hid what others parade and humbled herself for what would have given others reason to elevate themselves. Is there anyone here who lived with Sister Anne?@

AYes, Father,@ replied one of the Sisters, AI lived with her for a short time.@

AWell, Sister, what virtues did you remark?@

AShe was very patient in her sufferings, Father, never complaining, never growing weary of suffering. She sometimes feared, however, that she was a burden and was upset because she was unable to work like the others. I also noticed that Sister was very humble: she always thought that what she did was worthless and that what others did was much better.@

AIt's all right to feel upset at not being able to work,@ replied M. Vincent, Abut it's a temptation, Sisters, to think you=re a burden to others and to be troubled in such circumstances. You must be resigned to God's Will with regard to the illnesses He sends you, and believe that your Sisters are happy to practice charity in the services they render you.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI noticed that Sister Anne often shared with her Sisters the thoughts God had given her in prayer. She took great care that the sick whom she was nursing received the sacraments in due time. She never left a patient's room without saying something edifiying. She served poor persons as she would have served Our Lord, and used to say that she felt greater pleasure when she had been to see some poor persons than if she had been visited by her parents.@

AAh! Sisters,@ said M. Vincent, Awhat virtue! What a good Sister! To prefer visiting persons who were poor to seeing her own parents, and always seeing Jesus Christ in them! May God be forever blessed for that, Sisters! This should stir up in us the desire to give ourselves in earnest to Our Lord to imitate the virtues noted in this dear Sister, who, as we=ve just heard, was humble, patient, and charitable. Let's imitate above all her humility, desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing, and let's reflect that, if we make a show of the little good we do, we'll lose all the merit of it before God.

AMademoiselle, did you observe anything?@

AFather, I noted that Sister Anne had a great love of her vocation, courageously overcoming all the difficulties she encountered in it, which were far greater in her case than in that of others because her health was very delicate. Nevertheless, she didn't complain, and I never heard her say that she was unable to do what she was told. Her love for her vocation was also apparent in her last illness, for she asked insistently to be taken to the Motherhouse because she wanted to die there. She showed great patience in her sufferings and, when she was on her deathbed and someone said to her, >You=re really in a lot of pain,= she answered, >What I'm suffering is nothing in comparison with what Our Lord suffered for me.= She was submissive and obedient to the end, for, a moment before she died, the Sister infirmarian urged her to take something, although she felt a great repugnance because of the violent pains in her stomach which were brought on by anything she ate or drank. She took it nevertheless, showing that she was doing it through obedience; and she died shortly afterward.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, Athere's every reason to believe that she's with God. Let's see now what was remarked in Sister Marie Lullen, who was a native of Le Mans. Those of you who lived with her can tell us quite simply anything edifying you saw in her conduct.@

AFather,@ said a Sister, AI noticed that this dear Sister was very kind to the little children whom it was her duty to instruct. While she was in Nanterre, where I knew her before I had the happiness of being in the Company, I sometimes saw her kiss their feet, saying that she liked to think she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus.@

ABlessed be God,@ said M. Vincent. AThis good Sister had good reason to believe she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus. How pleasing He found such simplicity!@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Aone day I met Sister Marie when she was taking the children to Mass, and I admired her charity to a poor man she met on the way. She spoke to him of God,

and since he had not heard Mass and didn't seem to want to go, she chided him so much that she persuaded him to go.@

AI noticed that she was humble,@ remarked another Sister, Aand seemed content when she was rebuked. One day someone mortified her a little. Noticing that she seemed pleased, I expressed my surprise to her. >Sister,= she replied, >I must to abase myself so that Jesus may live in me.= @

AOh! what a beautiful remark,@ said M. Vincent, >I must abase myself!= And she rejoiced when she was reproached; may God be blessed and glorified! I'm not surprised that the Pastor of Nanterre has praised her so highly--although he's not very free with his compliments. But it seems that this dear Daughter had a virtue above the common run of people.@

AI knew Sister Marie Lullen while she was still in Le Mans, before she came here,@ added another Sister, Aand I remember that she and another young woman set aside their secular clothing and wore grey dresses; this led to their being ridiculed and mocked by those who disapproved of that change. They began to serve poor persons in the Le Mans hospital. They established great order in that house, where, until then, not much order had existed. Many people found fault with this, and they were really persecuted because of it, but they endured it courageously. In the end, desiring to give herself entirely to God, our good Sister decided to leave her family, which was very well off and in which she could have had every satisfaction, but her love of God caused her to leave everything courageously to come to our Community here in Paris.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, AGod doubtless had great plans for this Sister. Don't you think there's something in that, M. Portail? As for myself, I'm delighted with what has just been said. I never have greater consolation than when I hear an account of the virtues of our Sisters because it's clearly the work of God. May He be forever blessed for it!

AIf anyone noticed something else, let her mention it, for you see, Sisters, God's glory is made manifest by speaking of the virtues of our Sisters. He gave them these virtues to sanctify them, and He also wants us to profit from them by following their example. Mademoiselle, will you tell us what you know?@

AFather, this good Sister belonged totally to Our Lord, who had chosen her. She was a privileged soul. She had a special love for the practice of the hidden virtues and was very humble. I also remarked her conduct and submission when she was ill, taking the little things presented to her without showing any repugnance, and she expressed no annoyance when she wasn't given what she requested.@

ASisters,@ said M. Vincent, Athat's how you should act when you=re ill, and not say, >This medicine isn't prepared properly; I can't take it.= To speak like that and to express your likes and dislikes is a sign of great imperfection. If someone takes pleasure in eating and drinking or looks for tasty foods, she must be on the watch against that, for such persons are scarcely ever virtuous. How guilty you=d be, Sisters, if you didn't profit from the good example of our Sisters, about whom such beautiful things have just been said!

AThat brings us to the third Sister of whom we have to speak. Who lived with Sister Marguerite Bossu?@

AI was with her for a short time,@ replied a Sister. AI noticed that she had a great love of the poor and also that, when I reproached her for something, she took it well and made no excuses.@

AShe was also very quiet and gentle,@ added M. Vincent. AWould you like to tell us anything

about her, Mademoiselle?@

AFather, I recognized in her a great love of her vocation, for she surmounted the difficulties raised by her parents, who were very reluctant to allow her to come here; but she left them courageously, and when she was admitted, she was so overjoyed that all the wealth in the world couldn't have made her want to leave the Community. She was in it only a year, but her fervor made her worthy of receiving her wages, like the workers who came at the eleventh hour and received as much as those who had labored all day long. In the same way, I think Our Lord was as pleased with the service this good Sister rendered Him than if she had served Him for many years because she did, in fact, have the desire to serve and honor Him all her life, however long it might have been. Sister Marguerite was very gentle and did everything she was told, without ever finding fault with it. She was very obedient and had a great love of the Community. She clearly demonstrated this when she became ill and, being told by the Sister with whom she was on mission that she should return to the Motherhouse, got up immediately and manifested the greatest pleasure at coming here, even though she was very sick.@

AWhat a fine Sister!@ said M. Vincent, Awhat a good thing it is to love to come to the Motherhouse! She showed clearly that she loved only God, since she was so detached from everything. She made no difficulty about leaving the house where she was happy, in order to do the Will of God. That's how you should act, Sisters, and never seek any pretext to dispense you from doing what you=re told.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, AI remarked that Sister Marguerite was very zealous to learn what we=re supposed to know and was also very discreet in what she said; she was unwilling to speak one unnecessary word, especially during the time of silence. It made me ashamed to see her virtue and to be so far removed from it myself. She always spoke about edifying things, especially the happiness of her vocation.@

ABlessed be God forever! What excellent practices! Aren't you touched at hearing this account of so many beautiful virtues, M. Portail?@

AWe still have to share our thoughts on the virtues remarked in Sister Delaître. Who lived with her?@

AFather,@ said Mademoiselle, Athis dear Sister never left the Motherhouse. She was here only four months. Her ministry was to serve the poor in Saint-Laurent parish.@

AWell, what virtues did you note in her, Mademoiselle?@

AI noted great gentleness; she was very attentive to the sick, but wasn't hasty nor anxious about it. She was active and hard-working, and looked for no notice for the work she was doing. She was very much inclined to what was good and the desire to improve, very forbearing with her Sisters, and very obedient to her Superiors. Her only regret was not having served the poor for very long.@

AWhat a good Sister! Although young in the Company, she was mature in virtue. In the short time she was in it, she accomplished what someone else might have done in six or even ten or twelve years. What a happiness, Sisters, to live among plants that bear such fruit! But also what a shame to see ourselves still vain, still seeking our own satisfaction. If there should be any among you who might desire to be seen, to be known, and to look for notice, if there should be any, I repeat, she should humble herself before God and say, >O my God, what shall I say? What shall I do? What shall I answer on Judgment Day, when I'll be reproached for having lived with the spouses of Jesus Christ, with Sisters filled with virtue, and didn't follow their example!= What a misfortune if there were any who might seek the appreciation of creatures or want to be

commended! Nothing further would be needed to draw down the curse of God on the entire Company! I=d like to think that all of you are disposed to belong to God in real earnest. Don't you promise me, Sisters, to determine to work at your perfection and no longer have any high opinion of yourself? For as soon as someone has a high opinion of herself, she wanders away from God. So, make up your mind, Sisters, to renounce your own will in order to no longer will anything but the accomplishment in you of the holy Will of God.@

AYes, Father,@ responded all the Sisters, Athat's our earnest desire.@

AI hope so, with the help of God's grace,@ replied M. Vincent, Aand, on His behalf, I will now pronounce the words of blessing, asking Him at the same time I am saying them, to fill our hearts--mine as well as yours--with the desire to acquire the virtues of which we=ve heard the account.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

47. - CONFESSION

March 5, 1651

AThe topic of this conference is confession, dear Sisters. It's divided into three points. The first deals with the reasons obliging Daughters of Charity to know how to make a good confession; second, the faults they may commit in confession, and third, the means of making a good confession. This is an important subject, Sisters; and, if we don't make good confessions, we=re in danger of often committing sacrileges.

APlease tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AOn the first point, Monsieur, I thought that one of the reasons obliging us to know how to make a good confession is that we can't teach the sick how to make a good confession, if, in the first place, we don't know how to do it ourselves. Another reason is that this sacrament is like a second Baptism, in so far as it restores us to grace. This is what obliges us to make a very careful preparation for it. The faults that may be committed are: not having the purity of intention of going simply to place ourselves in the state of pleasing God and seeking too much of our own satisfaction. The means of making a good confession are deep humility and the thought of the enormity of sin, etc.@

AThat's good, Sister. God bless you! And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.@

AIt seems to me, Father, that if we don't make a good confession, we=re in danger of committing a sacrilege.@

ASister's first reason is that, if our confession isn't made properly, we commit a sacrilege and add to the number of our sins and, instead of the ten we had, we carry away eleven; and if you die in such a state, dear Sisters, you=re lost. And what faults may be committed during your confession?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that they include not making a good examination of conscience, masking my sin, and not explaining it as it is.@

AAlas! yes, Sisters, it's a serious sin to lessen the gravity of your sin and to confess it other than it is. How many people will be damned for that!@

AIt seems to me, Father, that it's vanity that makes us excuse ourselves, and we really don't want people to see that our sins are as bad as they are.@

AYes indeed, it's a spirit of vanity, a diabolical spirit when, instead of accusing ourselves, we excuse ourselves. Sisters, it doesn't discredit a Sister to make known her faults. Oh no! on the contrary, when she humbles herself and says, >I=ve done such and such; I'm so wretched as to

have done that,= then we see that it's the spirit of God causing her to speak in that way.

AAnd you, Sister, why do you think Daughters of Charity must know how to make a good confession?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that our predestination depends on a good confession, and we should reflect that perhaps this may be the last time God will give us the grace of going to confession.@

AYes indeed, dear Sisters, our predestination does perhaps depend on that act. In connection with this, I'll tell you that some Prelates told me at a meeting that they had taken the resolution, every time they went to confession or celebrated Mass, to reflect that it might perhaps be the last time. Just imagine, Sisters, Prelates are giving us this example!@

AIt also seemed to me that, if God gives me the grace to go to confession one more time, I could be better disposed to go another time.@

AOur Sister says that we can make a good confession to prepare ourselves for another. That may be, because to make a good confession so as to be able to make a better one at another time is very good; and in fact, the good use of the graces God gives us is not only meritorious for the present action, but also for the next and for all others.

ABut into what faults may we fall in our confessions?@

AWe can make light of our sins, thinking perhaps that it's no great matter and that we'll do better another time, or else to diminish their gravity for fear that we may be thought less of.@

AOur Sister says that if we let any sins slip by for any motive whatsoever, what will happen? Ah! Sisters, great misfortunes! The evil spirit makes himself the master. Finally, the Sister who fails to make a good confession may fall into serious sins both in public and in private. But when, on the contrary, we=ve made a good confession, God's grace is immediately restored to us, and all the good works we=ve done return with an increase of faith, hope, charity, love of God, moderation, and humility; in a word, with all the other virtues.

AAnd you, Sister, what reasons do the Daughters of Charity have to know how to make a good confession?@

AI think it's to acquire the grace of God, Father.@

AThat's good: to acquire the grace of God. We should be happy for everyone to know our sins; one of the saints has said that we should be ready to tell our sins in the public marketplace.@

AThe faults we commit in confession are human respect, which comes from vanity or even through habit, and lack of contrition. That's all the more to be feared since sometimes our sins appear trivial. It seems to me that it's good to mention some serious sin of our past life--even several.@

AYes, mentioning some serious sins from our past life is a very good means to incite us to contrition: >My God, I did such and such when I was young,= for it's to be feared that we may not have sufficient sorrow for ordinary sins.

ABut tell me, Sister, if a Sister goes to confession without manifesting any sorrow for her sins, is her confession good?@

ANo, contrition is essential.@

ABut, Sister, is it good always to accuse ourselves of the same sins?@

ANo, because we have to strive to correct ourselves; but when it happens that we fall into the same sin, we have to say so.@

AYou see, Sisters--I have to say this for the sake of some scrupulous souls--there are certain

faults into which we can't prevent ourselves from falling. Even the saints, as the Holy Spirit tells us, fell seven times a day; I'm talking about letting our mind wander, flighty thoughts--even during prayers--and other similar faults. And yet that may upset a poor Sister. What should be done then? When you keep falling into the same faults, you must humble yourselves before God, desire to be united to Him, and say, >How I should humble myself before You, my God, and long to see You!= and then patiently make acts of hope and humility, offer yourselves to God, and stir yourselves to contrition and a firm purpose of amendment.

ABut tell me, Sister, would a Sister who resented the admonitions given her be making a good confession?@

ANo, Father.@

AIs it a fault to choose a confessor, Sister?@[1]

AYes, it is, Father.@

ASister, what do you think of a Sister who wants one confessor and won't have another?@

AFather, a Sister who wants one confessor and won't have another has too great an attachment and is self-seeking.@

A >But,= you'll say to me, >he knows me better, and what he says is more relevant to me.= That's not it, Sisters, it's an attachment--not to say love--and it would become wrong as it continued. Take my word, dear Sisters, it's a propensity toward that, and to put it plainly, it's a sentimental attachment, which, if not remedied quickly, can make confession invalid. I ask God to give our Sisters the grace never to become attached to any confessor, either in this parish or in any other, and I make this prayer to God with all my heart, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, for all of you, that the confessor may not become attached, because that would be the ruin of him. God willing, I'll say Mass for that intention, Sisters--not tomorrow but Wednesday.

AIs there any fault in saying that the confessor is too harsh or too gentle, or to complain that he doesn't say anything?@

AYes, Father.@

AIs it wrong to say, >What if he told someone the sins I told him!= Is it also wrong to make known what he said to you?@

AYes, Father.@

AYes, without a doubt it's wrong, Sisters, and very wrong, for the penitent is as obliged to secrecy as the confessor, and a person who goes off and says, >He told me this and that,= sins grievously.

AIf he leads her to do something wrong or makes some flattering remark such as, >No one has pleased me so much nor given me as much satisfaction in my guidance than you have,= or any other remark that expresses affection, then, Sisters, beware of that! *Mon Dieu*! how dangerous that is! She should report it. But to whom? To her Superiors and to no one else.

AAnd you, Sister, tell me: does a Sister do wrong who argues about her penance, or even refuses the ones imposed on her, or doesn't want to go to a certain confessor because he gives penances that are not to her liking?@

AYes, Father, that seems to me to be a serious fault.@

ADoubtless a serious fault, Sisters; that reminds me of a beautiful saying of Saint Augustine, >A person who refuses his or her penance refuses forgiveness.=

ADoes someone who goes to confession without examining her conscience, without contrition, or without a desire to accept her penance or to make restitution of the property of

others in her possession commit a sin?@

AYes, Father.@

ASin is never, never remitted without restitution.

AIs it a sin to economize on what belongs to the poor in a parish in order to appropriate it to yourself?@

AYes, Father.@

A*Ah, Dieu*! it's a sacrilege, Sisters, because it's taking from God something that belongs to God and using it for yourself--and I don't think a single one of you falls into that sin; no, not a one, by the grace of God--because this sin is never forgiven without making restitution, Sisters, and not only of the property but also of honor.

AYou must never speak of others, even in confession; if you can't conceal the evil done by someone else, it would be better to remain silent about your own sin. But is it to deprive a Sister of her good name if you mention a Sister's faults to her Superioress so that she may do something about it? Not at all! it should be mentioned, but never to others, for to take someone's property is nothing; but to take away one's honor is to deprive the person of everything. If that has ever happened with you, Sisters, please don't do it again.

ANow please tell us your thoughts, Sister.@

AFather, the first reason for learning how to make a good confession is that we=d otherwise often be in danger of committing sacrileges. The second is that we couldn't teach poor persons nor the girls in our schools, if we didn't know how to make it well ourselves.@

AThat's a fine reason, Sisters, because you have persons who are poor here, and especially the girls in your classes, whom you have to teach how to make good confessions.@

That's why M. [Vincent],[2] turning to the priest who accompanied him, said, AWill you please write down everything those little girls should be taught on this subject? The Sister in charge of the new pupils will teach it to them because this is very important. And, as long as we live, we will please have a conference every year on this topic. I ask you, Monsieur, Mademoiselle, and you, Sister, to remind me of it. Go on, Sister.@

AAmong the numerous faults we can commit when we go to confession, I noted three principal ones, Father. First, speaking too much. That happens when we mention sins we haven't committed, when we talk about domestic matters, when we reveal the faults of our neighbor, and, lastly, when we discuss things that have nothing to do with the confession.

ASecond, speaking too little; for example, when we don't give the number and circumstances of our more serious sins, when we fail to mention certain sins, either because we=re afraid the confessor may repeat them to someone else--which we should never fear--or for any other motive.

AThird, not to state things clearly, that is, to cloak our sins so they don't appear as they really are, or to mention them as if we=re dubious about them: >If I have done such or such, I ask God's forgiveness,= when we=re not dubious at all, or to make excuses for ourselves, or to keep back a sin in order to mention it to another confessor. To my mind all these are serious faults. As for the means of making a good confession, I think it suffices to be attentive to these five points, with the grace of God.@

AThat's very good, Sister. God bless you! Mademoiselle, will you please tell us your thoughts?@

AFather, may I ask you a question regarding what has already been said?@

AYes, most certainly.@

AIf the confessor has no intention of giving absolution unless the person does the penance[3] he gives her, has the person been absolved if she doesn't do the penance?@

ANo, Sisters, the confessor gives you absolution only on condition that you do the penance he gives you, and you don't receive it if you don't do the penance.@

AAs the first reason,@ continued Mademoiselle, AI thought that when the sacrament of Penance is received properly, it really helps souls to glorify God, putting them in this state by the reconciliation it brings about with His Goodness, who pardons all their sins. A second reason is that, if we don't do our utmost to receive this sacrament well, in a certain sense we=re spurning the grace God offers us in this sacrament, by which the merits of the death of the Son of God are applied to us. The third reason is that we put ourselves in danger of dying impenitent and outside the grace of God--which we certainly deserve, since we=ve refused it.

AAs to the second point, there are many faults we can commit in regard to the preparation for making a good confession, but there are three or four major ones. One is not to have the desire to correct ourselves, since we=re in a frame of mind that hinders us from knowing our faults, or not to acknowledge them; this prevents us from being able to confess them.

AAnother fault is to fail to stir ourselves up to have deep sorrow--or simply sorrow--in the will, for having offended God. We could do this easily by applying ourselves to consider the goodness of God, His love for us, and our own perversity in having offended Him.

AA third fault is the fear of telling our sins to our confessor as they actually are. And a very great and grievous fault, for each of our sins in particular or for all in general, is not being attentive to work at correcting ourselves and of asking God for the grace to do so.

AOn the third point, the means of preparing ourselves to make a good confession, the first thing we must do is to have a high regard for this sacrament and a great desire to receive it, and, to that end, to be well instructed in all that helps us to do so. Second, to go to the confessional convinced that we=re sinners; to reflect that it's God to whom we=re about to speak, without considering the person of the priest who listens to us; to accuse ourselves as consciously of guilt and as clearly as we=re able, not making known that others are the cause of our having offended God, being very careful, above all, to conceal the accomplice of our sin without very grave necessity; and not to keep anything back. Lastly, when we=ve finished accusing ourselves, we must continue to have the remorse our sins should have given us, listen with great reverence and humility to the advice of our confessor, receive the penance with amazement that God permits it to be so small, turn our minds once more to deep regret for having offended God, and, in expectation of His mercy, listen to the holy absolution, thinking that at that moment the merit of the Blood of the Son of God, poured into our souls, washes away our sins. In this way we=re totally renewed in grace and made pleasing to the Blessed Trinity.@

AGod be praised, Sisters! I'm deeply edified by all that has been said. I think you do make good ones and, for the consolation of many of you, let me say that, as long as I=ve been hearing your confessions, I=ve been greatly consoled by them. Most of you were making very good confessions, and I like to think you=re doing even better and haven't relapsed but, on the contrary, are doing even better and better. Courage then, dear Sisters! How happy you'll be if you make your confessions in the manner described, for a good examination of conscience, contrition, a firm purpose of amendment, an integral confession, and perfect satisfaction! Blessed be God, Sisters! For that's the basis of perfection and I=d like to think that, if you act in

this way, God will shower you with His graces. That is what I, though unworthy, ask Him with all my heart to do and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing over you.

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

48. - INDIFFERENCE

@TEXT70 = (Now 43a.)

49. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

April 25, 1652

AThis conference, dear Sisters, is divided into three points: first, the reasons we have for profiting from the reminders others give us; second, the faults we may commit when told of our failings; and third, the means of benefiting from the admonitions we receive.@ Because M. Vincent had been delayed by some business matter, M. Portail began to question the Sisters. The first Sister said that one of the reasons why we should profit from the admonitions we receive is the charity our Superiors have for us. Just as it's a charity on their part to bear with us in our faults and failings, it's a greater charity for them to admonish us and to desire that we correct ourselves. Another reason is that if we=re not reminded of our faults, we'll keep on committing them.

Turning to another Sister, M. Portail said to her, AWhat fault can we commit when we=re reminded of our failings?@

AI think that the worst fault we can commit, Monsieur, is not to accept the admonition as coming from God, who reminds us through our Superiors, and afterward to murmur and complain to another Sister.@

ASo you think that one means of benefiting from admonitions is to believe that God speaks to us by the mouth of Superiors.@

AWhat obliges us to be content to be reminded of our faults,@ said another Sister, Ais that it's a means of killing self-love, which always does its utmost to conceal our faults from us. If we find it hard to accept the charity given us, all the more reason would we find it difficult to acknowledge our faults ourselves. One means of benefiting from admonitions is to mention our own faults to the Superioress when we=re aware of them. Another is to think frequently of the faults of which we=ve been reminded so we can correct ourselves. There's no more certain means than to ask God often for this grace, because of our weakness.@

AYou=re right, Sister, in saying that we must have recourse to God, for we resolve often enough to take admonitions in good part, but when the time comes, our resolutions are to no avail.@

Another Sister was saying that God would ask an account from us of the admonitions our Superiors--and even our peers--had the charity to give us, when Most Honored Father arrived. He knelt down as usual, asked M. Portail if the conference had begun, and on being told that it had, he added, ABlessed be God, Sisters! Blessed be God!@

And turning to the Sister who was speaking, he said, ATell us your thoughts on the subject of the conference, Sister.@

AFather, I thought that what obliges us to profit from the admonitions given us is, in the first place, that we don't know ourselves; consequently, we need someone to remind us.@

AYou=re right, Sister; we=re blind, we don't know ourselves. A blind person never sees the sun, and we don't see our own face. That was a very good point our Sister made; remember it

carefully. Continue to tell us what you thought, Sister.@

AFather, my thought is that God will demand a strict account of the admonitions that have been given us.@

AGod bless you, Sister! You see, it's a very certain truth taught in Holy Scripture, Sisters, that God will demand an account of the admonitions given us, and if we don't make good use of them, it's greatly to be feared, Sisters, that the measure of our ingratitude being filled, God may abandon us, for a Sister who allows herself to be carried away by natural feelings when she has been reproved for her faults, becomes so hard-hearted afterward that nothing moves her. The less she likes what may be told her for her own good, the more she finds fault with everything that's done. If a regulation for the good order of the house is made, she complains about it; if she sees a Sister faithful to her duty, she scoffs at her and treats her as pietistic; she has nothing but temptations against her vocation and distress of mind--all because she didn't profit from admonitions nor resist the impulses of corrupt nature.

ALook, Sisters, Judas was lost because he failed to resist his covetousness. If a Daughter of Charity acts in a similar manner, she'll soon leave, even though God may still continue to give her His grace, for He didn't deprive Judas of it, although He was aware of his vice. The sun shines on a blind person as well as on someone who can see, but it shines in vain because the blind person sees nothing.

AAnd what did you think on the subject of this conference, Sister?@

AFather, I thought, as you stated, that not to benefit from admonitions is to grow hard-hearted. I also thought that we shouldn't be satisfied with reminders from our Superiors but should also ask those who are with us to do us the charity of admonishing us of our faults. I=ve asked this service of my Sisters, Father, and promised them that every time they render it to me I'll say three *Our Fathers* and three *Hail Marys* for their intention and will remember them at Holy Communion.@

AGod bless you, Sister! God bless you for having this beautiful practice! Dear Sisters, how I wish that this practice might be adopted among you of asking one another, especially your Sister Servants, to remind you of your faults, in order to give greater freedom to the Sisters with whom you live to tell you anything they may have remarked in you that might not be good! When a Sister asks you to admonish her, you must do it with great respect and humility and, after excusing yourself, say, >It's true that I noticed this fault in you, Sister; but perhaps you weren't aware of it.=

ASister Servants have to be admonished as well as the other Sisters, for the saints themselves need to be reminded of their faults. The disciples were sent two by two, as today's Gospel teaches us, so that they might practice fraternal charity.

ANow, Sisters, there are two kinds of admonitions: general admonitions and personal ones. The first are those given for all at conferences. To admonish a Sister who is vain in her appearance or who holds conversations with men is a personal admonition. If she doesn't benefit from it, it's for her damnation.@

Turning to another Sister, M. Vincent asked, AWhat fault do you think we can commit when we=re told of our failings, Sister?@

AFather, one great fault is to allow ourselves to get angry and be carried away by emotion, and then to let this be seen by our Sisters, whom we scandalize. I myself have greatly failed in that respect.@

ADid you ask pardon of the Sister in whose presence you acted that way, Sister?@

ASometimes, Father.@

AYou see, dear Sisters, you have to ask pardon of each other when you=ve disedified or displeased your Sisters so that, by this means, you may heal the wound that has been inflicted.@

Most Honored Father let us see his very profound humility on this point by telling us something we didn't know. He said he had committed a fault in regard to a Brother, who was reporting some business matter to him. AI spoke sharply to him,@ he said, Aand other persons could hear it. I think M. Portail was present.@ He repeated the same thing two or three times to give M. Portail the opportunity to say that he had been there, but M. Portail didn't say a single word.

AOn the following day,@ M. Vincent went on, Awhen the same Brother was taking care of business with me, I spoke to him sharply again. I recognized my fault when I was examining my conscience, and in full chapter I knelt down and said, >I ask your pardon for having spoken sharply to you,= and I asked him to ask God to forgive me. That's what we must do when we=ve been remiss, Sisters. The wife of the General of the Galleys[1] was quick-tempered, but as soon as she realized that she had been impatient, she would kneel down before her maid and ask her forgiveness. Do that, Sisters; it's the means to preserve union; for, if you speak or correct with emotion, you strike and wound your Sister. She feels an aversion for you; considers whatever you say or do as bad; makes up her mind to do nothing to please you; she can't stand you. But ask her forgiveness, and let her see that you=re sorry for your fault; that's the way to remove all bitterness from her heart.

AWhen we=re reminded of our faults, or when we admonish others, Sisters, there's no problem, unless it's done in a fit of temper. Our Superiors have to admonish us; even though they see that a Sister grumbles or takes an admonition badly, they still have to remind her of her faults, for, sooner or later, she'll profit from this. Don't be surprised if she's sad and crestfallen, for an admonition is a medicine and a bloodletting to eliminate bad spirits. When a very bitter medicine is brought to you, you loathe it, you scowl, you balk at taking it, but you take it nevertheless because you know it will cure you.

AThe Sister who is admonished should be very careful to control her feelings, though naturally hurt and annoyed, and to profit well from the correction, even if she's not aware of the point of which she's being reminded. She should turn to God in her little oratory or before the Blessed Sacrament and say from the depths of her heart, >O my God! I'm deeply pained by this; I'm being corrected for a fault of which I have no knowledge. Well, my God, others know it; may You be forever blessed for this!=

AA Sister who acts like that, dear Sisters, will benefit from admonitions, if she makes good use of the charity shown her by those who reprove her. That's adorning the Company, gilding it, and inserting precious stones in it. Above all, Sisters, I recommend to you the practice of our Sister who said that she asked her Sisters to remind her of her faults. And when should you do this? Begin this very evening, if the opportunity presents itself. And when should you continue? Tomorrow and forever, Sisters. I say forever, for, believe me, if you establish this practice firmly in the Company and make good use of the admonitions given you, dear Sisters, your Company will be one of the holiest in God's Church. If you don=t, you'll bring about its ruin. People will ask, >Where is that lovely Zion, of which everyone spoke so well, that lovely Company of Daughters of Charity? Where is their modesty, good order, attention, and vigilance for the poor? Where is their reserve in not speaking to men and not allowing them to enter their rooms? Where are those Sisters who died like the saints?= None of that will be seen again.

ASisters, it's a question of doing something to strengthen your Company. I'll see about the means to be taken to remedy any failing of which I'm informed. If, through the fault of Mlle Le Gras, M. Portail, the Sister Servant, or myself, you don't advance in virtue, Sisters, we'll have to answer for it to God, and He'll demand a strict account of us.@

We see by this how earnestly Most Honored Father M. Vincent desired our perfection, with what care he tried to obtain it, and also the need to be thoroughly convinced that, despite the promptings of nature, our Superiors are obliged to watch over us, since they must render such an exact account.

AI'm forgetting something . . . @ M. Vincent added, AI don't remember what; please let me know, M. Portail, or tell us some thought that will benefit the Company.@

AI think, Monsieur, that one very necessary point is to be satisfied when our Superiors are informed of our faults.@

AThat's very fine, Monsieur, what a good thought! God bless you! Yes, Sisters, we must be content to be reminded of our faults. When we=re sick, we=re glad that someone tells our father, or tells the physician, and that he is given a thorough explanation of our illness. And why, Sisters, if not to get some relief and have people sympathize with us, especially since, when they commiserate with us, we feel relieved? It's right to want this. When Our Lord was about to die, He was certainly hoping for this satisfaction, and it was an extreme suffering for Him that no one sympathized with Him when He was on the Cross. Now, dear Sisters, sin makes our soul sick, and sick of a mortal illness; let's be glad to have someone notify the doctor about it, that is, to notify those who can find a cure for it.

AWhy not do what is done in a religious house I know, Sisters? When the Superioress is told that a Sister has committed a fault, she says to her, >Sister, I hear you=ve committed such and such a fault.= The Sister kneels down and replies, >Mother, not only have I committed the fault you mention, but certain circumstances make it even greater than you have been told.= Just see the virtue of those good nuns, dear Sisters. Even though someone may dislike being corrected for her faults, she disregards that and cheerfully promises to amend and to correct herself. That's what should be done, Sisters: don't let your emotions run away with you; overcome and cast off the sadness and distress that tries to grip your heart.

AMademoiselle, please tell us your thoughts on the need we have to be reminded of our faults.@

AFather, we must be willing to be admonished because of Our Lord's words to the man who had struck Him a blow in punishment for having spoken the truth: >If I have spoken ill, reprove me.=[2] Becoming angry, complaining, and looking for excuses are the faults we can commit. One means of profiting from admonitions is to believe that people do us a great charity by reminding us of our faults.@

AThat's beautiful! God bless you, Mademoiselle! See, Sisters, how Our Lord, who is innocence personified, wishes to be reproved and submits to it. Ground yourselves firmly in these practices, Sisters, so that your Company may be strengthened in virtue; and since God's graces operate according to the dispositions they find in persons, dispose yourselves to receive the blessing He's going to give you by the most wretched and greatest sinner of all men, who offers himself to God to ask Him for the grace to benefit from all that has been said and to do forever His most holy and adorable Will. This is what I desire with all my heart, Sisters. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .@*

49a. - INSTRUCTION TO SISTERS BEING SENT TO POLAND

September 5, 1652

On September 5, 1652, Most Honored Father M. Vincent informed our three Sisters who had been chosen to go to Poland that they would be leaving the next morning. Divine Providence caused their departure to be postponed until September 7.

The names of the three sisters are Sister Marguerite Moreau, Sister Madeleine Drugeon, and Sister Françoise.[1] Most Honored Father gave them approximately the following advice: ADear Sisters, I think you=re aware that for more than two years the very virtuous Princess, the Queen of Poland, has been urging me to send her some Daughters of Charity to establish in her kingdom works like the ones she had seen them do in France. We needed time to reflect on this appeal to be sure that it came from God. Now there is no longer any doubt about this, since this good Lady has persevered in her desire and has been putting great pressure on me for the past six months to send her some Sisters.

ASisters, what a happiness the assurance of this call is for the entire Company! And what a joy for you to have been chosen from among so many others in the Company, who might perhaps do better than you! You should have no doubt of this. But why is this call a cause for such great happiness, Sisters? Here are a few reasons:

AThe first is that it's God who is calling you. What a great vocation it is to be called by God! This is clear from the complaint God himself makes when persons try to work in His service when He hasn't called them. And doesn't Our Lord make the greatness of a vocation to follow Him clear when He says to His Apostles, >You have not chosen me but I have chosen you=?[2] So have great respect for your vocation. Humble yourselves, dear Sisters; be astounded by this grace, and be very grateful for it. If you don't humble yourselves in view of your own nothingness, amazed that God has drawn you out of poverty and lowliness to make use of you, what would you be, dear Sisters? Had you remained in the way of life destined for you by your birth, you would have been like your peers, doing the manual labor of poor people. Who would have shown you any more respect than they do to others of your background? That's why you and I have great reason to humble ourselves. This humility must be solid, however, causing you always to consider others better than yourselves.@

50. - THE SPIRIT OF THE COMPANY

February 2, 1653

After saying the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* as usual, Most Honored Father began as follows: ASisters, this conference is divided into three points: first, the reasons that oblige us to know clearly the spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity; second, in what this spirit consists; and third, the means of being firmly grounded in it.

AHave you made your prayer on this subject, Sister? What do you think? Why must Daughters of Charity know what the spirit of their Company is?@

AI haven't considered the matter at great length, Monsieur, but it seemed to me that we should perform our actions in a spirit of charity, in imitation of Our Lord.@

AThat's well said, Sister. Before we go any further, however, you should know, Sisters, that to all Companies God has established for His service He has given a particular spirit, along with the esteem and practice of the virtues connected with that spirit. It is, as it were, the soul of the Company, which gives it life. Dead animals, deprived of their vital principle, are fit only to be thrown into the dump; the body can no longer act. To make this point clear, Sisters, I'll tell you that, as God has made use of this principle in regard to Companies, He has given the Capuchins the spirit of poverty, by which they must go to God, living detached from all earthly anxieties

and from all private property. To the Carthusians He gives the spirit of solitude. They=re almost constantly alone; their very name is indicative of this spirit because formerly prisons weren't called prisons but charter houses; their spirit makes them continually prisoners of Our Lord. To the Jesuits God has given a spirit of learning to be shared with others. The spirit of the Carmelite Nuns is austerity; that of the Visitation Nuns, aimed at loving God deeply, is one of gentleness and humility. So you see, dear Sisters, that God conveys His Spirit differently to some and to others, in such a way that the spirit of one isn't the spirit of the other.

AWhen God created the Company of the Daughters of Charity, He gave it a spirit of its own. It's the spirit that animates the body. It's important for Daughters of Charity to know in what this spirit consists, just as it's important for a person setting out on a journey to know the route to the place she wants to go. If Daughters of Charity didn't know their spirit, to what could they devote themselves in a particular way?

ATell me, Sister, do the Daughters of Charity have to know in what their spirit consists?@

AYes, they do, Monsieur.@

AAnd why?@

ABecause if they don't know it, they'll do something very different from what they should be doing.@

AAnd you, Sister, why must a Daughter of Charity know what her spirit is?@

AIt seems to me, Monsieur, that a Daughter of Charity who didn't know her spirit would be like a person who, without knowing a trade, would try to practice it; she=d act quite differently from the way she should; she has to learn it before adopting it.@

AWhat you say is the truth, Sister; if a Visitation Nun led the life of a Carmelite, she wouldn't be doing what God asks of her.@

AWell now, Sister Antoinette, why do you think the Daughters of Charity must know their spirit?@

AAll of them must know their spirit, Father; if anyone, out of devotion, tried to live like a nun, she=d upset her companions and would fail a great deal in the service of the poor.@

AThat's well said, Sister. If the Daughters of Charity knew God's plan for them and how greatly He wants to be glorified by it, they would consider their state fortunate and superior to that of religious. Not that they shouldn't regard themselves as much lower, but I don't know any religious Company more useful to the Church than the Daughters of Charity, if they really enter into their spirit for the service they can render their neighbor, unless it's the nuns of the Hotel-Dieu[1] and the Sisters of the Place Royale;[2] who are both nuns and Daughters of Charity at the same time because they devote themselves to the service of the sick--with this difference, however, that they nurse them in their own establishment and assist only those who are brought to them, whereas you go to them in their own homes and minister to those who are dying without any assistance because they don't dare to ask for it. In that you do what Our Lord did. He had no home of His own; He went from town to town, from village to village, and healed everyone He met. *Eh bien*! Sisters, doesn't that show you clearly the greatness of your vocation? Have you ever really reflected on that? *Quoi*! doing what God did on earth? Wouldn't you have to be very perfect? Yes indeed, Sisters! Shouldn't you be angels incarnate? Ask God for the grace to be well aware of the greatness of your ministry and the holiness of your actions.

ALeave grandeur to nuns; have a high opinion of them, but don't seek out their society--not that it isn't good and very excellent, but sharing their particular spirit isn't proper to you. The same holds true for male religious as for nuns. You should never turn to either of them in your

needs, so greatly should you fear to share in any spirit other than the one given by God to your Company. And how could you receive advice from a person in a religious Order, whose life is completely different from yours, and who could ordinarily advise you only according to his or her own maxims and spirit? That's why, Sisters, in the name of God, you mustn't frequent their society. Furthermore, you can't do so without doing harm to the service of poor persons or children, who are in constant need of your service, whether you go to seek them out in their homes or whether you prepare in your house what they need.

AOn this point, I have to praise two of our Sisters. Having heard that I was officiating at a Sister's profession at the Visitation convent, they went there to see the ceremony and, when they saw me, asked permission to be present. Although I felt some difficulty about granting this, I still acceded to their desire. Then one of them said to me, >Father, Mlle Le Gras told us one time not to indulge this curiosity and not to frequent the company of nuns.= How is that, Sister? Would it upset you not to go? >It doesn't matter to me, Father; I'll do whatever you tell me.= Well then, go off, Sister, and mortify yourself in this matter.= I really have to praise this action, Sisters, because it's truly laudable. As long as you do well, I'll praise all of you, but if you do something wrong, I'll also reprimand you.

AThis incident can serve as an example to you, Sisters, because if our Sister had asked the advice of a nun, most likely she wouldn't have dissuaded them from going to see the ceremony, and for good reason, according to her spirit; and our Sisters would have lost the merit of renouncing their own will and the slight mortification they may have had on that occasion.@

The Daughters of Charity should note the humility and deference of Most Honored Father in his reply to the Sister.

AThat shows how important it is, Sisters, that you take only the advice of persons capable of giving it to you and to whom God has communicated your spirit. Our Blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva expresses this so well in his *Introduction*,[3] >If a Bishop wanted to follow the spirit of a Carthusian and live like one, he wouldn't be acting according to the spirit God has given to his office and, therefore, he wouldn't acquit himself of his duty.= So it's important, Sisters, that you have no communication with nuns. But, don't say that to them because they might perhaps think it's through contempt. Oh no, on the contrary! The esteem you must have for them puts you very far below them. So, it's not advisable for you to tell them that you=re forbidden to do that; for what would they think, not knowing the reasons we have for giving you this advice? How necessary it is, Sisters, for you to give yourselves to God to know your spirit! One thing you may find very helpful is to call to mind the virtues of your Sisters who have died, which were very great; and I have no doubt that there are several saints among them. You'll find in them the marks of the true spirit of the Daughter of Charity. Try to imagine what they were, what they did, and spur yourselves on to imitate them.

ASister Françoise,[4] in what does the spirit of the Daughters of Charity consist?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that it consists mainly in obedience to Superiors and in the observance of the Rules. With that, I think our Sisters will have the spirit God wants them to have.@

ASo, here are two signs by which to know if a Sister has the spirit of a Daughter of Charity: it was said that one sign is patience in suffering, in imitation of Our Lord; and you=re adding a second, namely, submission to one's Superiors.

AAnd what other sign do you have, Sister, of the spirit of the Company of Charity present in a Sister?@

AThe exact observance of the Rules, forbearance, and graciousness, Father.@

AWell now, that's the third sign of the Daughters of Charity, and it's very necessary to practice all three in order to imitate Our Lord; it's not enough to work for the service of the poor; mutual forbearance and condescension are also necessary. Who doesn't need forbearance? Think about a husband; no matter how much he loves his wife, he has to put up with her. He can't imagine that she'll always be the same as on her wedding day, or that in the second year she'll be the same as in the first, or that the third will be like the second. Her moods will change, and so he has to bear with her. Likewise, the wife will have to put up with him and realize that not a day will pass without some change of mood, and he won't be as cheerful in the evening as he was in the morning.

AThe same holds true of ourselves, Sisters. We=re often so distressed and ill-humored that we have a hard time putting up with ourselves. It sometimes happens that we=re so dissatisfied with ourselves that in the evening we regret what we did in the morning. Shouldn't our personal experience help us to bear with one another?

ATwo Daughters of Charity will be on mission together. No matter how virtuous they are, they won't always be in the same mood, and yet they have to be united and friendly with one another. One will be sad, the other cheerful; one satisfied, the other discontented. If you observe carefully you'll see that we=re never in the same mood for a whole hour. And what must be done in such circumstances, Sisters, except to bear with one another and practice this so very necessary virtue of condescension?

AKeep this practice in mind, Sisters; for, otherwise you won't be Daughters of Charity but daughters of discord and confusion, which would give bad example to your neighbor and be a great scandal to her. Be on the alert so that you don't often deceive yourself by thinking that your Sister is in a bad mood. Oh no! she's not the one; you are. That's why you have to endure the annoyance you feel. And if you can't shake off the idea that she's cranky, accede graciously to her wishes, provided they=re in no way contrary to the Will of God. If you do, you'll be fulfilling your obligations, you'll please God, and He'll be glorified in you. But should it unfortunately happen that Daughters of Charity were to disregard forbearance and condescension, the neighbors would take offense and say, >They=re not Daughters of Charity but little demons who tear one another apart.= Avoid this disorder among yourselves, Sisters; see the great necessity of forbearance. But someone may ask me, >How many times a day do we have to put up with one another, Monsieur?= My answer is this, Sisters: as often as the occasion arises. If you bear with one another twice or four times, so much the better; that's so many diamonds and precious stones you=re adding to your crown, and can be the greatest help to you in establishing the spirit of the Company of Charity among you. So, give yourselves to God, Sisters, for such an important matter. If you observe this practice you'll draw down many graces on yourselves and on the Company, of which God wants to make use. Good Mme Goussault understood this truth clearly. Speaking about your Company, which she loved tenderly, she said to me one day when she was on her deathbed, >Rest assured, Monsieur, that this Company will be very useful to the neighbor and will bear great fruit.= These must not be empty words, dear Sisters, and for that you must give yourselves earnestly to God so that His plan may be fulfilled in you.

AIt's getting late; we have to finish. I recommend to your prayers our Sisters in Poland, who are giving such beautiful signs that they have the spirit of true Daughters of Charity. You know about their arrival in Poland, Sisters, and how kindly they=ve been welcomed by the Queen. After giving them time to get used to the country and to learn a little of the language, she said to

them, >Now, Sisters, it's time to get to work. There are three of you; I want to keep one of you with me, and it's you, Sister Marguerite;[5] the other two will go to Krakow to serve the poor.= >Ah, Madame,= replied Sister Marguerite, >what are you saying? There are only three of us to serve the poor, and in your kingdom you have plenty of other people more capable than we are to serve Your Majesty. Allow us, Madame, to do here what God is asking of us, as we do elsewhere.= >What, Sister! you don't want to serve me?= >I'm sorry, Madame, but it's because God has called us to serve the poor.= Isn't that beautiful, Sisters?

AO Savior of my soul, God has permitted this example in order to animate you. *Quoi,* Sisters, to trample royalty under foot! What great virtue you need, Sisters! Mustn't you truly have the spirit God has given the Company? How fortunate you are to have been called to it! And how fortunate you will be if you persevere! On the other hand, however, what a misfortune for a soul who, because she was unwilling to submit to the Rules of the Company, should fail in fidelity to God and see herself deprived of His graces. Consequently, as her fervor gradually diminishes, she'll be on the verge of leaving the Company on some vain pretext temptation puts before her! How ashamed such a person should be! But I don't think there are any of these in the Company. If there were one and she were not moved by this example, what could possibly move her? Not that everyone may not be tempted, Sisters, but you have to resist courageously, and then the temptation is a proof of true and solid virtue.

AI forgot to tell you that, when the Queen of Poland was speaking to our Sisters about the foundlings in Paris, she added that, after these children had been raised, they could be admitted into the Company, and that Sister Marguerite, without too much reflection, had replied, >Forgive me, Madame, our Company isn't recruited from, nor composed of, such persons. We accept only virgins.=

AIt was God who caused her to speak like that, Sisters, to let us know that there should be only pure and chaste persons in the Company. That's why I=ve so often recommended that you avoid the company of men, even should they be saints. It's so important for you to have very great respect for this virtue! I tell you once again, don't allow men in your rooms, not even your confessors, even if it should be M. Portail. Remind them of what you=ve been told, unless it's a case of illness.

AI didn't tell you, Sisters, that our poor Sisters in Poland are in a town where many people are dying of the plague, and, although every possible precaution has been taken, they=re still in danger. I recommend them to your prayers. And do you know what M. Lambert[6] did for Sister Marguerite when he sent her to serve the poor in a certain area? He placed her under the guidance of Sister Madeleine Drugeon, which she has taken very well. Let's thank God for that.@

Most Honored Father then knelt down and said, ABlessed are You, my God, for the graces You are giving the members of this little Company. Please continue to grant them, my God, and don't permit them to abuse them by glorying in them; but rather give them the grace to humble themselves in proportion as You raise them up, admiring Your power of working so many wonders in such lowly subjects.@

And when the Sister Servant asked his blessing for the whole Company, His Charity said with great humility, A*Quoi*! I, my God, wretched sinner that I am, that I should give the blessing to holy souls and to Your servants! But since You will it, I'll pronounce the words of blessing, *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

51. - THE SPIRIT OF THE COMPANY

February 9, 1653

ASisters, the subject of this conference is the continuation of the one we held on Sunday, which was on the spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. It's divided into three points: first, the reasons that oblige you to know what your spirit is; second, in what it consists; and third, the means of grounding yourselves firmly in this spirit.@

ALast Sunday we dealt with the first point, and I asked you how a Sister can show that she's a true Daughter of Charity. Several of you were questioned and explained how important it is to know this spirit.

AToday we should discuss the second point. I won't question anyone because it would be hard to find someone who could answer me, except perhaps Mademoiselle, for, if I ask you what this spirit is, you'll reply, >Have you ever told us, Monsieur? Teach us what it is and we'll give you an answer.=

ANow, for you to understand this clearly, dear Sisters, you must know the difference between your Company and many others that profess to assist poor persons as you do, but not in the way you usually do. The spirit of the Company consists in giving yourselves to God to love Our Lord and to serve Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor in their homes or elsewhere; to instruct poor young women, children, and generally all those whom Divine Providence may send you. You see, dear Sisters, this Company of Daughters of Charity is composed, for the most part, of poor young women. How excellent is this characteristic of poor young women--poor in their clothing and poor in their food! In fact, people call you poor Daughters of Charity, and you should consider it a great honor to have this title because the Pope himself considers it a great honor to be called the *Servant of the Servants of God.* This qualification of *poor* distinguishes you from those who are rich. You=ve left your villages, your parents, and your possessions. And why? To love Our Lord and His maxims. You are His daughters and He is your Father. He begot you and gave you His Spirit; for whoever sees the life of Jesus Christ would see far and away the similarity in the life of a Daughter of Charity.

AAnd what did He come to do? He came to teach and to enlighten. That's what you=re doing. You=re continuing what He began; you are His daughters, and you can say, >I'm the daughter of Our Lord,= and you must resemble Him. So then, what is the spirit of the Daughters of Charity? It's the love of Our Lord, Sisters. Isn't it natural for daughters to love their father? And in order for you to understand what this love is, you should know that it operates in two different ways, one affective; the other effective.

AAffective love is the tender element of love. You must love Our Lord tenderly and affectionately, like a child who can't bear to be separated from her mother and who cries out >Mama= as soon as she tries to move away. In the same way, a heart that loves Our Lord can't endure His absence and has to hold fast to Him by this affective love, which produces effective love. For the first doesn't suffice, Sisters; you must have both. Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love. These two kinds of love are like the life of a Sister who belongs to the Charity, for to be a Daughter of Charity is to love Our Lord tenderly and steadfastly: tenderly, being pleased to speak of Him, think about Him, and filled with consolation when you reflect, >*Quoi!* My Lord has called me to serve Him in the person of the poor; what a happiness!=

AThe love of the Daughters of Charity is not simply tender; it's effective, because they actually serve persons who are poor, corporally and spiritually. It's your duty to teach them how

to lead good lives--I repeat, Sisters, to lead good lives; that's what distinguishes you from many nuns who care for the body only, without saying a good word. There are only too many like that. Now then, *mon Dieu!* let's not talk about that any longer; now then, *mon Sauveur!* the Daughter of Charity mustn't be concerned only with assisting the sick poor corporally; unlike so many others, she must instruct the poor. You have to do this in addition to what the Sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu and the ones at the Place Royale do; you also have to go to seek out poor persons in their homes, which, until now, has never been done, whereas they=re content to take in those God sends them.

ASo then, you must take the sick poor two kinds of food: corporal and spiritual, that is, to tell them some good thought from your meditation--five or six words to prompt them to fulfill their Christian duty or to practice patience. God has reserved this for you. Neither church history nor secular history states that anyone has ever done what you=re doing--with the exception of Our Lord--which gives you great reason to humble yourselves. People brought the sick to Our Lord for Him to heal them, like that poor paralytic they lowered through the roof of the house. Isn't that what you do in hospitals? Ah, Sisters! From all eternity you were destined to serve poor persons in the same way Our Lord served them! Yes, Lord, you=ve waited until now to form for yourself a Company that continues what you began.

AAnother purpose of your Company, Sisters, is to teach the fear and love of God to children in schools, and you have that in common with the Ursulines. But, because their houses are large and wealthy, poor persons can't go there, and come to you for assistance.

AFurthermore, when some disaster occurs in Paris--in wartime for example--people turn to the poor Daughters of Charity. I see no one better qualified than you to assist poor persons in every way. You wouldn't be Daughters of Charity if you weren't always ready to render service to persons who might need it.

AThat, in broad terms, Sisters, is the essence of affective and effective love: to serve Our Lord in His members spiritually and corporally in their own homes or wherever Providence may send you.

AYou should know then, dear Sisters, that the Spirit of your Company consists of three things: to love Our Lord and to serve Him in a spirit of humility and simplicity. As long as charity, humility, and simplicity exist among you, one may say, >The Company of Charity is still alive,= but when these virtues are no longer seen, then people can say, >The poor Company of Charity is dead.= A Daughter of Charity who has no humility and charity is dead, for she doesn't have its spirit; she's like the person to whom the angel in Holy Scripture says, >You are dead because you don't have charity, which is the life of the soul.= Just as the soul is the life of the body, the day when charity, humility, and simplicity are no longer seen in the Company, the poor Company of Charity will be dead; yes, it will be dead.

AI=ve just seen a poor man from Étampes, who is very disabled. I asked him, >Who did that to you, my friend?= And he replied, >The dead.=[1] That's what the dead do, Sisters; they cause the living to die. And just as a body, from the day it no longer has its own spirit, is dead, so a Daughter of Charity who does not have her spirit is dead. Where is the charity of a Sister who has no humility or simplicity, and who doesn't serve the poor with kindness and love? She's dead. But, if she has these virtues, she's alive, for that's the life of her spirit.

ADo you understand this clearly? Do you really grasp my meaning, Sisters?@

Several Sisters said, AYes, Father.@

Most Honored Father then went on, AI repeat once again, Sisters, that the spirit of your

Company consists in the love of Our Lord, love of persons who are poor, love of one another, humility, and simplicity. It would be better if there were no longer any Daughters of Charity, if they didn't have these virtues.

AThat, Sisters, is your spirit in three points. Well now, it's getting late. Perhaps if I begin to explain humility, I'll wear you out; that will be for another time, please God.

A >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >mustn't all Christians have those three virtues?= Yes, Sisters, but the Daughters of Charity have to be more attentive to practicing them. Anyone who sees you should know you by these virtues. Whether you=re talking with your neighbor or going through the streets, do it plainly and simply, recalling that the angels see your reserve. When you go to the refectory, always go with those three precious stones of humility, charity, and simplicity.

AAll Christians are bound to practice these virtues, Sisters, but Daughters of Charity are obliged to practice them in a special way. >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >don't we have to practice all the other virtues?= Yes, you do, but you have to practice these three especially; heaven and earth call you to this. Carthusians are obliged to practice all the virtues, but they devote themselves especially to singing the praises of God. Capuchins are obliged to practice all the virtues, but none is so dear to them as poverty. And it's God's Will that the Daughters of Charity devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, charity, and simplicity.

AHere's an objection you may raise: >That's all very well, Monsieur, but how can we acquire and preserve this spirit?= I recommend two things to you, Sisters; first, to ask God for it every day at morning prayer, at Holy Mass, at noon, and throughout the day, especially at the beginning of your principal actions, saying interiorly, >Am I doing this out of charity, for the love of God? Am I not doing it by natural temperament or from vain complacency? For example, I come here to mention my faults to Mademoiselle; do I have enough humility to do it? Am I simple? If I use ambiguous language, if I say things other than they are, I lack simplicity.=

AThe second means is to lead a good life in the spirit of a true Daughter of Charity and, at your examination of conscience in the evening, to examine yourselves to see if you=ve acted in conformity with your spirit. >Did I carry out my actions today in the spirit of charity? Did I not do them out of pride? Did I not use duplicity?= If you recognize any faults in yourselves, you must do penance for them; if the fault is serious, take the discipline--but with permission; kiss the floor, say an Our Father and a Hail Mary; and if it's customary to visit the Blessed Sacrament, do so with this intention. If you do all that, Sisters, you'll generate in yourselves the love of lowliness and will increase the spirit of charity and of humility.

AO Savior of our souls, Light of the World, please enlighten our understanding so that we may know the truth of what we=ve just heard, You who have formed for Yourself a Company of poor women who serve You in the manner You have taught them. Make them Your instruments, my God, and give them and me, wretched sinner that I am, the grace to carry out all our actions through charity, humility, and simplicity in the assistance of the neighbor. Grant us this grace, Lord. If we=re faithful in the practice of these virtues, we hope to have the reward you promise to those who serve You in the person of the poor.@

As Most Honored Father was about to conclude, Mlle Le Gras said to him, AFather, I beg you to offer us to God so that we may enter fully into this spirit, and ask Him to forgive us the faults we=ve committed against this same spirit.@

AI'll do so tomorrow at the Holy Mass I'm going to celebrate in honor of Saint Appoline, who loved Our Lord so much that she gave up her body to torture and her life for His sake. *Benedictio*

Dei Patris. . . .@

52. THE SPIRIT OF THE COMPANY

February 24, 1653

After reciting the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, Most Honored Father began as follows: AWell now, dear Sisters, we=re going to look once again at the spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity and the many virtues that go with it. Sister, please tell us what the spirit of the Company is.@

AFather, you told us that it consists of charity, humility, and simplicity, and that charity includes two sorts of love: one affective, the other, effective.@

AYou say that charity consists of two sorts of love. What do you mean by affective love and effective love, Sister?@

AFather, affective love causes us to love God tenderly and joyously; effective love causes us to move to the practice of the good works that present themselves to be done for Him.@

ADo you understand that clearly, Sister?@

AYes, I do, Father.@

ADid I give any example to distinguish one type of love from the other? That, dear Sisters, may be explained by the example of a father who has two sons: one is the youngest child, four or five years of age; the other is grown up. This father has two kinds of love for his children. He loves the little one tenderly, he hugs him, plays with him, is delighted with what the child says and does, and even sometimes lets the little one beat on him. That's affective love. As for the other son, he doesn't speak to him so often, and when he does, he speaks more seriously. He lets the little one do anything he likes. Now, if someone were to ask this father which one he loves best--the little one, for whom he shows so much affection, or the older one, for whom he doesn't do that--he=d answer, no doubt, that he loves the older one more. And, in fact, he intends to provide him with a profession and make him his heir, but he doesn't make a show of it. The first kind of love is affective; the second, effective. Now, dear Sisters, you must have these two kinds of love. The spirit of the Company of the poor Daughters of Charity consists of these two kinds of love for God and for your neighbor as well, beginning with your Sisters; it also consists of humility and simplicity, so a Sister is a true Daughter of Charity when she has these virtues. On the contrary, if you see a Sister who lacks charity, a sly, proud, cunning Sister, she's not a Daughter of Charity.

AHow many virtues make up the spirit of the Daughters of Charity, Sister?@

AThree, Father.@

AAnd what are they?@

ACharity, humility, simplicity.@

After questioning other Sisters, who answered in the same way, Most Honored Father added, AIn the first conference I spoke to you about charity, the first virtue necessary for your spirit; today I'm going to speak about the two other virtues, which are humility and simplicity. First, we'll look at the reasons why you should have this spirit; then, its characteristic marks; and third, the means of acquiring it--or of preserving it, when you have it.

AThe first reason is that your spirit is for you what the soul is for the body. Now, as soon as a body no longer has a soul, it's dead. In the same way, a Daughter of Charity is dead as soon as she no longer has her spirit, that is, as soon as she no longer has humility, charity, and simplicity. God have mercy on her! She's no longer a Daughter of Charity except in her attire. It would be better if she were no longer one. Have you ever seen a sick person with gangrene or an infected

limb? All possible remedies are used to heal it; if they=re ineffective, the diseased limb is amputated. So, it would be better that a Daughter of Charity who doesn't have the spirit of the Company should not remain in it--better for her own salvation, for the glory of God, and for the good of the Company because she spoils everything. There are Companies in which a single person has spoiled all the others. So then, Sisters, that's the first reason: a Daughter of Charity is dead when she doesn't have its spirit.

AThe second reason for asking God for this spirit and for striving to acquire it is that God himself has given it to your Company. I=ve told you this before, but since all of you weren't present, I'll say it again. It's not Mlle Le Gras, it's not I, it's not M. Portail, it's God who has given this spirit to some great saints, now in heaven, for we can believe that some of them are there. If Mlle Le Gras, or M. Portail, or I have done anything, alas! it was rather to place some obstacle in the way of this. God is the author of works whose author can't be found. I never thought of it; consequently, it's God himself who did it on His own.

AThe first Confraternity of Ladies established in Paris, by God's inspiration, was that of Saint-Sauveur parish. At that time a poor young woman from Suresnes[1] had a desire to teach those who were poor. She had learned to read while tending cows. She had procured a primer for herself, and whenever she saw someone, she would ask him to point out the letters to her; then she would spell them out, little by little, and when other people passed by, she would ask them to help her to form her words; on their return, she would ask if that was what they had told her to do. When she learned how to read, she went to live five or six leagues from Paris. We went there to give a mission. She made her confession to me and told me about her plan. When we set up the Charity there, she was so attracted to it that she said to me, >I=d like very much to serve the poor in that way.=

AAround that time, because the Ladies of the Charity of Saint-Sauveur were women of quality, they were looking for a young woman who would be willing to carry the soup pot to the sick. When that poor young woman came to see Mlle Le Gras, she was asked what she knew, where she had come from, and whether she was willing to serve the poor. She gladly accepted. So, she came to Saint-Sauveur and was taught how to administer medicines and to render all the necessary services, and she succeeded very well. And that's how it all began, Sisters. We never thought of it. That's how the works of God begin; they=re accomplished without anyone thinking of them. That poor girl had been led in this way from her youth.

ACalled for the establishment of the Charity in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish, she slept with a girl who had the plague, which she caught from her, and was taken to Saint-Louis Hospital, where she died. We were so impressed with that poor young woman that we accepted others who presented themselves, and they did what she had done.

AAnd that, dear Sisters, is how God brought this work into being. Mademoiselle never thought of it, neither did I, nor did M. Portail, nor that poor young woman either. Now, it must be admitted--it's the rule laid down by Saint Augustine--that when we don't know the author of a work, it's God himself who has done it. Who gave the spirit to the poor Daughters of Charity--I mean the good ones? It's God himself. Daughters of Charity who have their spirit have the spirit of God. God began this work; so it's from Him. Never forget that human beings didn't do it, but God.

AIn the second place, since God turned to a poor village girl for this, He wants the Company to be formed of poor village girls. If some are from towns, all right, you have to believe that it's God who attracted them to it, but if women of the upper class were to come, you should fear that

this might ruin the Company, unless they had the spirit of a poor village girl, for God could well give them this spirit. If society ladies were to come, you would have to be wary and test them well to see if the Divine Spirit wills them to be there. Well now, dear Sisters, that's the second reason, namely, that it's from God that you must get your spirit.

AThe third reason is that it would be terrible for a Daughter of Charity not to have charity but rather a spirit of pride, and might try to be noticed and to control everything; she might dress in a singular way, arrange her hair to let people know that she had some, might have no simplicity, but a double-dealing spirit, inclined to conceal her thoughts from her Superioress, her Director, and her Sisters. She wouldn't be a Daughter of Charity, but rather a Daughter of malice. This is very important, Sisters. Please put it into practice.

AThe second point concerns the conditions or signs that indicate whether a Daughter of Charity really has her spirit. There are three signs. First, to be truly charitable. A charitable Sister is one who loves God, takes pleasure in speaking of Him, does her utmost to please and satisfy Him, and endures, for love of Him, the sufferings that come her way. How well our dear Sisters who have gone to God showed clearly that they had this spirit!

AThe second sign concerns our neighbor. It's found in the Sister who sets aside her own satisfaction for love of the neighbor, who leaves the people or places she likes, and, when told that a sick person needs her, makes no distinction of persons, and doesn't prefer the clean ones to those in a sorry condition.

AThe third sign is indifference. The Sister who has the spirit of a true Daughter of Charity is ready to go anywhere, prepared to leave everything to serve her neighbor. If we love Our Lord, we find Him everywhere.

AThose are the three signs of charity, Sisters: to love God and the poor, to make no distinction of persons, and to be indifferent to all places.

ANow let's look at the signs of humility. A person is humble when she loves her own abjection. If there were among you a deformed person, someone who limped, who might love her infirmity, she would love her abjection. I knew one[2] who had a crippled thigh that she used to call her dear thigh, her blessed thigh. That was her humiliation. That's why she never married. In the same way, if one of you had a disfigured face and loved that scar, that would be humility. To love to think that we don't have a mind capable of doing good is to love our own abjection. If a Sister who is criticized, rightly or wrongly, in the Company or in the parishes, loves this criticism, she loves her own abjection. If you=re questioned, as we do here, and you don't know much to say, you must love that.

AHave a humble opinion of yourselves, consider yourselves unworthy not only of speaking well, but even of belonging to the Company, and say in regard to all things, >O my God, what have You done! *Quoi*! I, a miserable Sister, to continue to do what You did on earth! I'm so wretched! I spoil everything and am incapable of anything.= On the other hand, Sisters who have a good opinion of themselves think they=re intelligent and say, >I know how to earn my living; I know how to do many things.= They boast that people miss them everywhere when they leave. What a cursed state of pride!

ASo, that's the first sign of humility, Sisters: to have a lowly opinion of yourselves, to think that you spoil everything, like Job, who said, >I fear there is sin in all my actions.=[3] We may say of a Daughter of Charity who has such fear that she has true humility. A Sister is also humble who always takes the worst for herself, who always wants to be last, who says all the good she can of her Sister companion so that the latter may be appointed Sister Servant, and speaks

disparagingly of herself so that she may no longer be one. That, Sisters, is a true indication of humility.

AThe third sign is found in those who are distressed at being praised and upset when they hear someone commend them. It's a bad sign when a Daughter of Charity is pleased to be praised and does all she can for that purpose. We=re humble when we love our own abjection.

AHere now are the signs of the virtue of simplicity. A Daughter of Charity is simple when she carries out the orders of her Superiors without asking why these orders have been given her. The Sister who says, >Why do they want me to do that?= and picks them apart, has a quarrelsome disposition and is far from the simplicity that causes Sisters to obey the Rule without questioning it.

AA truly humble Daughter of Charity isn't concerned with what people will say about her, or what will happen to her when she obeys; she doesn't reflect on what people will think of her, whether they have a good or bad opinion of her, whether she's regarded as virtuous or not; it matters little to her if there's some embarrassment in serving the poor, practicing virtue, or doing some act of charity. A Sister who has the virtue of simplicity pays no attention to all that. And here's another sign, dear Sisters, namely, to say what you think. If Mademoiselle asks a Sister a question, she must say what she thinks, but if another Sister comes and asks you what Mademoiselle said to you, you must keep silence if there's any harm in making it known. I repeat, if you have to give an account to your Superiors, tell things just as they are and conceal nothing; you=re obliged to be simple toward them, and Sisters who are not are two-faced.

AThere are things about which you must be silent; as for example, if your Superiors told you to keep a secret, or you were in danger of causing harm to your neighbor. Prudence then commands us to be silent. But when you must speak, dear Sisters, then speak quite simply. As for myself, I don't know, but God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel. I have special devotion and consolation in saying things as they are.

AWe still have to speak about prudence, but it would take too long; that will be for another time, please God. Let's now look at the means of acquiring this spirit, dear Sisters, and, for those who already have it, the means of preserving it.

AThe first means is to ask God for it. If there's anything we should ask of God it's our spirit, as I told you recently, because it's the life of our soul. Ask it of God, Sisters, at mental prayer and in all your prayers, as often as you can.

AThe second means, Sisters, is what I just told you, since a Daughter of Charity who doesn't have the spirit of charity is dead; she does live an animal life, but the supernatural life is dead. How pleased God is with a Sister who strives to acquire these virtues! He loves that Sister; He takes His delight in her; she's like a beautiful sun in His eyes; He points her out to the blessed and to our dear Sisters now in heaven.

AWell now, dear Sisters, let's take the resolution to work at our perfection, no matter what the cost, and each day let's say, >I want to be charitable, humble, and simple.= If you=re at table, be charitable; if someone with you needs something, point it out humbly; have a humble attitude so that no affectation or self-sufficiency is apparent.

AWith regard to simplicity, you can't very well keep or preserve it here except by using quite simply the things that are given to you.

AAs a third means, dear Sisters, examine yourselves daily to see if you=ve been careful to practice these virtues; ask yourselves often, >Have I done any acts of charity, humility, and simplicity?= And if you see that you=ve done one, thank God, Sisters, for He wants to be thanked

for it; but if you see that you=ve failed, Sisters, do penance in order to help yourselves to rise more easily from those faults by the punishment you'll impose on yourselves.

AWell now, dear Sisters, please remember this carefully because if ever there was a useful conference, it's this one. If there's anything in the world for which you should ask God, it's your spirit; and if you must give yourselves to God for any purpose, it's for that one. So then, may this spirit always be apparent in your coming and going; may people always see the spirit of charity, humility, and great simplicity, and that you never make use of craftiness. If you live in this spirit, dear Sisters, how propitious charity will be, how you'll honor it, how it will grow!

ASpeaking of this, I recall that the night before the late Mme de [*sic*] Goussault died, she said to me, >Monsieur, all night long I=ve seen the Daughters of Charity before God; how they will grow in number and do good! How happy they will be!= That means, dear Sisters, that if you=re good and you work to have your spirit, then God will be glorified in you, for He wants to be glorified by our good works. So, strive then with all your might to acquire these virtues of charity, humility, and simplicity, never concealing anything from your Superiors.@

All the Sisters knelt down, and Most Honored Father was about to give his blessing when one of them said to him, APlease allow me to accuse myself of a fault I committed a long time ago.@ After M. Vincent had given his consent, she added, AI ask pardon of God, of you, Father, and of the whole Company for something that happened when I was with a Sister who is now dead. I took a book from her without her knowledge. It was a beautiful book and I wanted to keep it. She looked for it and asked me about it; I told her I hadn't seen it. It happened that I was missioned from that place. God permitted that for my own good because I also intended to take something else. One day at prayer I was so tormented with remorse that I deeply regretted having committed such a serious fault and having lied to the Holy Spirit, denying something that I knew was true. At once I resolved to ask God's pardon and to hand the book over in your presence and in that of the whole Company. I do so now, and I ask you with all my heart to please ask God's forgiveness for me.@

AI'll do so very willingly, Sister. My God, may You be blessed, You who allow our faults to present us with the opportunity of practicing the virtue of holy humility! Oh! happy fault, Sisters! How happy we'll be if our faults bring us back to God, for you committed a great fault, Sister, but consequently God has been honored by the act of humility you=ve just made. I ask Our Lord to give this grace to all of you. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

53. - THE JUBILEE

April 17, 1653

ADear Sisters, the subject of today's conference is the Jubilee. It has three points: the first concerns our reasons for giving ourselves to God to gain the Jubilee properly; the second will explain what a Jubilee is and what is to be understood by the word >Jubilee= because many people talk about a Jubilee without knowing what it really is; and the third point deals with what we must do to gain it well.

ASister, tell us the reasons why we must give ourselves to God to gain the Jubilee well.@

AFirst of all, Father, it seemed to me that God will be honored by it because, when we do a good work as it should be done, God is glorified. Another reason is that perhaps this is the last Jubilee in our lifetime.@

AThat's well said. Sister has given two reasons. The first is that God is honored by our good actions when they=re well done. And since the Jubilee is a holy work, important to our salvation,

we must give ourselves to God to make it well, in conformity with what a great saint said: >Tell the just to do well whatever they do; whether they rest, or pray, or engage in conversation, they should do it as it should be done.= The second reason is that perhaps we may never see another one. Alas! I=ve seen many Jubilees and perhaps never gained a single one. Some Sisters may say that perhaps they'll never see another because the young may die soon and the older ones can't live much longer. That's why all of them should give themselves to God to make the Jubilee well.

AAnd you, Sister, did you know what the subject of the conference was?@

AYes, I did, Father.@

A*Eh bien*! Sister, what reasons do we have to give ourselves to God to make the Jubilee well?@

AFather, we have to give ourselves to God because without His grace we can do nothing.@

AThat's well said: we can do nothing without His grace. And from now on we must give ourselves to God to say fervently the prayers that will be prescribed for us. And you, Sister, what reason do we have to give ourselves to God?@

AFather, I think we have to give ourselves to God because without Him we could do nothing.@

AGod bless you, Sister! And you, Sister Antoinette, do you know what the Jubilee is?@

AFather, I think it means that God opens His treasures to us to give us many graces.@

AVery good! I'm going to explain to you what the Jubilee is, dear Sisters, and I ask you to retain it well so you can explain it to the Sisters who are absent and especially to the poor. The word >Jubilee= means jubilation. Before the coming of Our Lord it occurred every fifty years. God commanded that during that year people shouldn't till the earth; they were to live on the goods stored up in the preceding year. No one was to work; everyone rested during the year of Jubilee.

AIn the second place, property was restored to those who had mortgaged it; they were once more in possession of it and were released from all their debts. Slaves were liberated. So, everyone shared the benefits of the Jubilee during that year. In those days, Sisters, people used to be sold, but now they=re no longer sold--at least not in Christian lands. So, the slaves who had been sold were emancipated and were no longer subject to those who held them captive. What a great source of joy and jubilation for such persons! I leave you to imagine what a consolation this was for everyone after so much misery! That's what the Jubilee led people to hope for: rest, the recovery of their property, and the emancipation of slaves.

AThat Jubilee was temporal, dear Sisters, and a symbol of our spiritual Jubilee. Those who make their spiritual Jubilee properly receive the same spiritual graces; we=re set free and enter once again into possession of the benefits we had lost by committing ourselves to the devil, the world, and the flesh. For example, we had pledged faith, hope, charity, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Those beautiful virtues are the treasures of Christians and are like suns that shine on our souls and make us pleasing in God's eyes. Now, all of that is lost by sin, and by the Jubilee we are released from all our debts; we=re freed from the captivity of the demon and of ourselves to be given the liberty of the children of God; we enjoy the peace of a clear conscience, and are freed from the pains of purgatory that we had deserved by our sins.

AThe temporal Jubilee is related to earthly possessions and the spiritual Jubilee to those of grace. By the latter we enter once more into possession of all the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity. So, you see what great reason we have for rejoicing, dear Sisters, for having

exchanged earthly goods for spiritual ones.

ANow, dear Sisters, let's consider what a Jubilee is, strictly speaking. It's full remission of sins and a release from the punishments for which we would have to make satisfaction in purgatory. We were deprived of our possessions and were slaves of sin; grace gives us back those goods that sin had taken from us. >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >doesn't confession do that?=

AYou should know, dear Sisters, that there are two evils in sin: the evil of guilt and the evil of punishment. The guilt, Sisters, is the insult we make to God by turning our backs on Him; it makes us unworthy of ever seeing God. The punishment obliges us to suffer in this life or in purgatory. By guilt we turn our backs on God, by punishment we turn our face toward creatures, toward relatives, toward our country, and all other bad attachments. You have an example of this in David, who had sinned against God. The prophet Nathan said to him, >You have committed such a sin; well then, David, you have gravely offended the Divine Goodness. As for yourself, God has forgiven you, but your child won't turn out as you think, for he shall die.=[1] On hearing this news from the prophet, David wept because he loved the child tenderly. You see, Sisters, God had forgiven David's sin, but He still chastised him because of the punishment due to that sin. You see then that there are two things present in mortal sin: one that makes us turn our face away from God, and the other that makes us turn it toward creatures. You understand that clearly, Sisters. One is called the punishment of sin and the other the guilt of sin.

AConfession wipes away the guilt of the sin, so that if, before confession, you had your face turned toward creatures, you'll turn it back to God. The guilt of sin is therefore remitted, but not the punishment. The punishment is remitted in purgatory by fire. Because we=ve taken pleasure in creatures and given our hearts to them by loving them too much, this pleasure sends us to purgatory, which Saint Augustine says is a fire, greater and fiercer than we can imagine, and of which the element of fire is only a figure. >You have sinned,= says Saint Paul, >you will be purged, but purged as by fire; you will burn for that.=[2]

AWhy, dear Sisters, did Saint Magdalen do such great penance after the assurance she had that Our Lord had pardoned all her guilt? She continued to do great penance because she knew that the punishment due to her sins remained. She went off to a high mountain,[3] so steep and difficult that it takes several days to climb and descend it, and so cold that I myself, who was there in the month of August, had to wrap myself up because of the cold; but when we reached the foot of the mountain we found it was very, very hot there. So, Saint Mary Magdalen went up this mountain to weep over her sins, bearing in mind the pains of purgatory.

AYou see from this, Sisters, that after confession we still have the obligation to do penance in this world or in purgatory for a long time. By the Jubilee, we=re freed from those punishments, just as by confession we=re released from the guilt of sin. Now, Sisters, that's what the Jubilee does for us, a complete remission of the punishment due to our sins. I'm going to give you a comparison. When a man has been condemned to death and petitions the King for a pardon, the King gives him back his life, for he's the master of our lives and can restore them to the guilty. So, this man will have the pardon of the King, who spares his life. He must, however, present his letters to the Parlement, which confirms the pardon and states that the criminal will enjoy the King's pardon, that is, his life will be saved. But he'll be condemned either to banishment or to the galleys for four or five years or pay a certain sum of money to the widow, if he's a murderer; for the law ordains that anyone who kills another person will die; a life must be given for a life. In short, the King restores his life to him, but he has to pay a penalty in reparation for the evil

he's done; his life is spared him, but the punishment remains.

AIn the same way, by confession we receive the pardon of the Prince, who is God; but we have to undergo the punishment that the sin entails. Do you grasp this clearly, Sisters? Therefore, we have to make satisfaction for our sins; and how do we make satisfaction to God? By the Jubilee, which is drawn from the treasures of the Church. What are these treasures? They=re the merits of the life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the merits of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints.

AThe Blessed Virgin never sinned; she also suffered a great deal; where have all the merits of her sufferings gone? Into the treasures of the Church. The same applies to the tortures all the saints endured. Look at your patron Saint Laurence[4] (you should have a great devotion to him because he loved the poor), how courageous he was to endure such a unique form of torture as to be burnt alive, roasted on a gridiron, so that the grease that ran down his body served to make the fire even hotter! He endured all that with such great pleasure and courage that he said to the tyrants, >Turn me over on the other side; I'm cooked enough on this one.= So, Saint Lawrence suffered far more than was necessary for his sins, and those merits have entered into the treasures of the Church.

AThat's what these treasures contain, dear Sisters. And who can apply them? The Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. General Councils can grant a Jubilee, too. Likewise Bishops can dispense these treasures in their dioceses by granting indulgences, but only for a hundred days. The Pope and General Councils can grant a plenary indulgence and a Jubilee. Who teaches us that? Holy Scripture does, when Our Lord says to Saint Peter, >Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.=[5] Notice the power given by Our Lord to His Apostles, Sisters, and conjointly to their successors by these words: >Those whose sins you shall forgive (in the sacrament of Penance for the guilt, and by the Jubilee for the punishment), they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.=[6]

ASo that you'll remember this well, dear Sisters, I'll repeat it: our guilt is forgiven by the sacrament of Penance, and the punishment is remitted by the merits of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints, which are applied to us by the Jubilee. Those to whom God gives the power of applying these merits to us are the Popes. So, Sisters, these merits satisfy divine justice for us, and because you must know this thoroughly, I'll now ask you some questions.

ASister, what is the meaning of the word >Jubilee=?@

AFather, the Jubilee frees us from the punishments of purgatory after a good confession accompanied by sorrow for having offended God.@

AThat's right, Sister.@

AAnd you, Sister, what does >Jubilee= mean?@

AIt means joy, Father.@

AAnd in ancient times, Sister, was the Jubilee the same as it is now?@

AFather, the ancient Jubilee was temporal, to restore a person's property to him; Our Lord changed those temporal favors into spiritual ones.@

AThat's well expressed. God bless you, Sister! You say that the temporal Jubilee has been changed into a spiritual one. You see, people in ancient times could hope for this Jubilee only every fifty years, and it was a great source of joy to them because their property was restored to them; during that year they rested and slaves were emancipated. Doesn't this give us great cause for rejoicing? That Jubilee was a symbol of our spiritual Jubilee. If we=re under the slavery of

the evil spirit, we=re set at liberty; if we=ve lost the benefits of grace, they are restored to us.

AAnd you, Sister, tell us, has this temporal Jubilee become a spiritual one, and do we receive the benefits we=ve lost?@

AYes, Father.@

AIf we had been committed to the devil and had lost our benefits, which are faith, hope, and charity, do we recover them?@

AYes, Father; and the remission of our sins is granted in regard to both the punishment and the guilt.@

AWhat do we have to do to gain it?@

AWe have to do what the Pope orders, Father.@

AThat's well put; we have to do what the Pope orders, and that is to go to confession and Holy Communion, visit certain churches, and say the prescribed prayers there. If a person is already in the state of grace, he or she may make the Stations[7] before going to confession.@

AHow many evils are there in sin, Sister?@

AThere are two, Father, the sin and the punishment.@

AWhat is the guilt of sin, Sister?@

AIt's what causes us to turn our backs on God, Monsieur; and the punishment is what attaches us to creatures.@

AAnd you, Sister, are there two defects in sin?@

AYes, Father, the guilt and the punishment. By the guilt of sin we turn our back on God, and the punishment causes us to turn our face to creatures. The guilt is effaced by confession, and the punishment by the Jubilee and indulgences.@

ASister, on what is the Jubilee based?@

AOn the treasures of the Church, Father.@

AWhat does >treasures of the Church= mean?@

AThey=re the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints.@

AWell now, that's well stated, those are the treasures of the Church. Who can dispense these treasures?@

AThe Pope alone can grant the Jubilee and the plenary indulgence; Bishops can grant an indulgence of only one hundred days.@

ASo what is the Jubilee?@

AIt's an application of the merits of Jesus Christ that the Pope gives for the remission of the punishment due to our sins in this world and the next.@

AAnd you, Sister, you=re still very young, let's see what you know. How many evils are there in mortal sin?@

AThere's the evil of guilt and the evil of punishment. Guilt is turning our back on God, and punishment is attaching ourselves to creatures.@

AHow is the guilt of sin effaced?@

ABy confession, Father, and the punishment is effaced by the Jubilee.@

ATell me, Sister, from what source is the Jubilee drawn?@

AFrom the treasures of the Church.@

AThat's well said. Who can apply them?@

AThe Pope and General Councils.@

AYes, the Pope and General Councils can grant the Jubilee and plenary indulgences. What's

the meaning of Jubilee, Sister?@

AIt means joy.@

ASister, has the Jubilee, which in ancient times was temporal, been changed into a spiritual one?@

AYes, it has, Father.@

AWhat does the Jubilee do for us, Sister?@

AIt wipes away the punishment of purgatory, Father.@

ASee then, Sisters, if being released from debts isn't a great reason for rejoicing. In former times, people didn't work during this year of jubilation; everyone rested and enjoyed great tranquillity, and that was called the Great Sabbath.

AWell now, Sister, does someone who has gained the Jubilee have restored to her the benefits she had lost by sin?@

AYes, she regains possession of the virtues she had lost.@

ASister, when a person goes to confession, are both her guilt and punishment remitted?@

ANo, Father, only the guilt; the punishment is remitted by the Jubilee.@

AFrom where are those graces drawn?@

AFrom the treasures of the Church.@

AWhat is understood by treasures of the Church?@

AThey are the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ.@

AWho can apply them?@

AOur Holy Father the Pope[8] who, as Vicar of Jesus Christ, offers those same merits to God the Father for the sins that so many Christians commit every day.@

AWell now, God bless you! I'm deeply consoled, dear Sisters. When you go home, I think it will be well for you to discuss all that we=ve just said. You who live here will explain it to one another and especially to those who are absent. Make sure to remember that confession wipes away the guilt of sin and that the punishment is remitted by the Jubilee. We still have to say what must be done so that the Jubilee may be profitable to us and keep us from the fire of purgatory, in which we'll perhaps be obliged to suffer for twenty or thirty years, even though we=ve made good confessions. What good reason we'll have for rejoicing, dear Sisters, if we gain the Jubilee! But what must we do to gain it? I'm going to have the Bull read aloud for you, and then you'll see the intention of our Holy Father the Pope and of the Archbishop.[9]

ABrother,@ said Most Honored Father to the Brother who accompanied him, Aplease read the Bull.@

After it had been read, M. Vincent went on, ASo, there are four things, dear Sisters: we must be contrite, go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and visit four churches and say five Our Fathers and Hail Marys in each of them.@

AFather,@ a Sister asked, Ais it necessary to make a general confession?@

AIt's good to make one, Sister, but for you Sisters it's not necessary. I simply suggest it to you. It would be well if you began and finished by going to Holy Communion, without, however, adding any special Communions to the ones the Rule allows you. We must also pray for our Holy Father the Pope, Sisters, for peace, for the uprooting of heresies, and for the exaltation of Holy Church, that God may be pleased to give her good priests, good nuns, and good Daughters of Charity; that is, Sisters, that all the present needs of the Church may be supplied. So, that was the Bull of our Holy Father the Pope; here now is the instruction from the Archbishop.@

When the reading was finished, Most Honored Father said, AThose, Sisters, are the rules laid down by the Bull. You=ve just heard what they are and even what you have to do, namely, to be contrite, to be very sorry for having offended God, to go to confession and Communion, to visit the churches, and to say five Our Fathers and Hail Marys in each one. As for the Stations, those in good health will make them, but those who are aged or infirm, like Sister Jeanne at Saint-Martin,[10] can be dispensed from them by their confessor, whom they'll ask what to do in place of them.

AThe rest of you, Sisters, can visit the churches while making your rounds visiting the poor. This is what Our Lord wants, especially since the service you render to persons who are poor is also rendered to Him.

AYou'll say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys for the intentions of our Holy Father the Pope, who has ordered us to pray for the uprooting of heresies, the exaltation of Holy Church, peace, all the needs of the present time, and those that can't be specified. Go with great devotion, Sisters, with your eyes cast down and your minds occupied with good thoughts. The King himself makes his Stations on foot. The Queen does what she can. >I'm an old woman,= she says, >I can't go the whole way on foot.= Lastly, dear Sisters, I=ve never seen so much devotion as at the present time. O my God, I desire that it may be efficacious in Your sight and I hope, from Your goodness, that You will give us interior peace.

I almost forgot to tell you, dear Sisters, that in ancient times the Jubilee was celebrated every hundred years; then, when it became evident that people had to wait too long, the Jubilee took place every fifty years, then every thirty-three years in honor of Our Lord's thirty-three years on earth. This period was subsequently reduced to twenty-five years because people don't live as long as they used to. There's no shortage. Furthermore, in times of great necessities, we have recourse to God by this means.

ASo, make it with great devotion, after giving yourselves wholly to God, with the greatest possible desire to obtain from Him everything you need. This is the time for Daughters of Charity to ask God for the three beautiful virtues that make up their spirit: charity, humility, and simplicity. The charity you must have is charity toward God, toward your neighbor, and toward yourselves. You must begin with yourselves, loving one another tenderly. If a Sister wears the attire of a Daughter of Charity in the sight of God and the world, but doesn't have charity, that amounts to nothing. Humility consists in taking what is least and in looking upon yourself always as the last of all. The simplicity you must have is the kind you saw in our dear departed Sisters. You'll obtain the spirit of true charity from God by means of the Jubilee.

AMlle Le Gras, please tell us what you think.@

AIt seems to me, Father, that Your Charity has said all that can be said about this. All I can add is that, beginning with the newest members, we must strive to make good use of this means that God uses to give us His grace. Another reason for giving ourselves truly to God is that, the punishment of our sins being remitted in general, His Goodness may grant us the grace not to fall into those same sins for the rest of our life. It seemed to me that, in order to be restored to grace, we must turn to God, since nothing on earth can give us this grace, if the Divine Goodness doesn't do it.

AWith regard to the means, it seemed to me that we must have a strong desire to gain the Jubilee, considering how much we need it. Another is mistrust of ourselves. In my own case, I see that I'm powerless to make myself capable of this grace if God in His goodness doesn't supply for my defects.@

AWell now, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the grace not to offend Him and to remain steadfast in His love. As for me, the most wretched sinner of all, who need this grace more than anyone, I won't fail to pronounce the words of blessing over you, asking Him to give you at the same time the necessary dispositions for gaining the Jubilee well. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

54. - FIDELITY TO GOD

June 3, 1653

AThe topic of this conference, dear Sisters, is the fidelity we owe to God all our lives. This subject is divided into three points: our reasons for being faithful to God; what it means to be faithful to God all our lives; and the means of acquiring and always preserving this fidelity to God. Without fidelity, we=re nothing but poor wretched creatures, wicked and ungrateful to God.

AThe first point, then, concerns the reasons we have for being faithful to God. Is Sister Geneviève[1] here? Sister, what reasons do we have for being faithful to God?@

AI=ve thought of several, Father, the first being that God, who has granted us the grace of being Christians, of calling us to His service, and of preserving us in it, would reserve a severe punishment for us, if we were unfaithful to Him. Another reason is that we honor God by this fidelity to Him.@

AGod bless you, Sister! God bless you! Sister Jeanne, what reasons do we have for being faithful to God?@

AFather, it seems to me that since God is so good to us, we must be faithful to Him in gratitude for the graces He has granted us by calling us to His service. We can show our fidelity to Him by being exact in keeping our Rules.@

ACan you hear what our Sister is saying, Sisters? I think it will be a good practice to begin today to speak out loud. I'm reminding you of a fault in which I myself often fail. Isn't it true, Sisters, that frequently you don't hear what I say?@

APardon me, Father,@ replied a Sister, Abut we hear you quite well.@

AIf we really want our Sisters to hear what we=re saying, we'll speak out loud; if we have charity for our Sisters, we'll be glad for them to hear our thoughts; by speaking too softly, we=d deprive our Sisters of the good thoughts God has given us.

AAnd you, Sister, tell us the reasons that oblige us to be faithful to God.@

AFather, it's because God is good and is our Father and always continues to do us good, like a good father toward a child he loves tenderly. The child, on his part, is obliged to love a father who is so good to him, and he=d be very unhappy if he didn=t.@

AGod bless you, Sister! Our Sister says that we should be faithful to God, a God who is so good and who always continues to do us good. We would indeed be very unhappy if we weren't faithful to Him, Sisters. Another reason is that God is our father, but in a very special manner; yes, God is the father of the Daughters of Charity in a special way, so they shouldn't even inhale or exhale except to please Him. A Daughter of Charity is a tree that He has planted and should bear fruit only for God. How beautiful that is, Sisters! A wife takes great pains to please her husband. Everything she does is for that purpose. If she works to try to earn something, it's for her husband. So, Sisters, your whole aim in everything you do must be to please your Spouse. Look at a poor girl working in a village, and all the care and trouble she takes to serve her master. She expects nothing in return but her wages, and for that reason she strives to win the favor of her master or mistress. A Daughter of Charity isn't like that; she must desire no other reward for all her labors, both inside and outside the house, than to please God alone, who is the end for which she endures all her sufferings.

AWell now, sit down, Sister; God bless you! And you, Sister, stand up; what is fidelity?@

AIt's perseverance, Father.@

AWell said, Sister. Sister mentioned something that's very true: to be faithful is to persevere to the end in the service of God; for, without perseverance, all is lost. You can see this in a person who has served God for a year or two, Sisters; if she doesn't persevere, what good is it? It's good for nothing at all, no more than it would be any good for a Daughter of Charity to have spent ten, fifteen, twenty years, if you like, in the Company, if, after that, she grows weary and doesn't persevere. What does all she has done profit her, if not for greater damnation? It's not I who say this; it's Saint Jerome: >We Christians,= he says, >think very little of a person who gives himself to God in the beginning, if he does not persevere.= The reason for this is that there are many to be found who began well and ended badly, as you see in the case of Judas, who did so well in the beginning of his apostolate and came to a very bad end. He merited to be chosen from among all the Apostles to be the steward of his Master's household; he persevered for a time, and it's even thought that he had worked miracles. After all that, a few days before Our Lord died, he was so wretched as to sell his good Master for ready money. That's why, in punishment for his infidelity, God permitted that he should hang himself and burst open in the middle. Yet, he had begun well. Saint Paul, on the contrary, had begun badly; he wasn't only wicked himself, but went about like a roaring lion persecuting God's servants and hating them so violently that he=d have liked to exterminate them all, if he could have, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us. He thought he was rendering a service to God by doing all those wicked deeds. Despite all that, he was a great servant of God. Although he had begun badly, he ended well. So, our Sister was right to say that perseverance is essential and that, otherwise, it would profit us nothing to have begun well.

ANow, Sisters, I think it's better not to ask any more questions for fear of inconveniencing Mlle Le Gras, who isn't well. I'll tell you my own little thoughts on this subject and then, if there's time, I'll question some others.

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts?@

AFather, among the many reasons we have for being faithful to God all our life, the first is the example His Goodness has given us in many instances. The most important is the fulfillment of the promise God made to us, after the Fall, of giving us His Son to redeem us. He didn't fail to do so although, since then, the increase of our sins should have provoked His wrath not to grant us this mercy. We must, therefore, in gratitude for this grace, be faithful to God all our life. A second reason is what Our Lord told us with His own lips when He was on earth, promising a rich reward to those who are faithful to Him in little things. A third reason is that, if we aren't faithful to God all our life, we'll be eternally branded with the stamp of ingratitude, which we should greatly fear because this ingratitude is the height of all infidelities to God, and people are extremely blameworthy when some sign of this is discovered in them. A fourth reason for being faithful to God all our life is the love His Goodness continually shows us in the guidance of Divine Providence.

AWe can be faithful to God in many ways. First, by being attentive to recognize the graces His Goodness grants us at almost every moment, and to esteem them, receiving them with gratitude for His greatness and with the feeling or thought of our own lowliness and unworthiness. Second, to consider why God gives us these graces. It can only be to manifest His glory and to unite us to Him, who is our last end; this should raise our hearts to love Him above all things. Perfect fidelity to God is to make good use of the graces He gives us and to love His

most holy Will, even though our own will may often feel repugnance regarding what has to be done to carry it out.

AAs for the means of acquiring the fidelity we owe to God, I thought I should think often of my need of it and my powerlessness to acquire it on my own, and to ask God often for it, and to ask my Guardian Angel to help me recognize every opportunity--great and small--that God will give me to be faithful to Him, considering them of equal importance, since they concern God's desire to save me in order to glorify Him.

AAnother means is to make good use of everything that happens, pleasant or unpleasant, reflecting that the good stewards of this world neglect nothing that may increase their temporal wealth and that the Christian should have a similar concern for every opportunity given him or her to increase the graces of love of God for all eternity. These thoughts made me very ashamed because all my life long I=ve resisted the practice of those real responsibilities and, by my bad example, have perhaps led others to act as I did.@

AThat's really good. God bless you, Mademoiselle!@ The following is contained in the note of a Sister, who wrote out her thoughts: AThe first reason that occurred to me, Father, is that infidelity is a very great sin in the sight of God. A second one is that, by our want of fidelity, we make ourselves unworthy of the other graces God might have wanted to give us, had we not abused the first ones. A third reason is that fidelity, like perseverance, crowns all our actions. Fidelity consists in being exact to what we=ve promised God and in carrying out everything He desires of us in our vocation, particularly in our ministry. The means of acquiring this fidelity are: to think highly of God's graces, to thank Him often for them, to ask Him daily and earnestly for the grace of being faithful to Him until death, and to believe that it's important to be faithful in the smallest matters so that we may thereby dispose ourselves to be so in greater ones. That's what I asked of God, recognizing my great need of it.@

AFather,@ said another Sister, Athe first reason that obliges us to be faithful to God is His great goodness to us. The second is our own interest because, if we aspire to participate in the merits of Jesus Christ, it's absolutely necessary for us to be faithful to God until death. I thought that to be faithful to God is to keep the promises we=ve made to Him. His Goodness gently urges us on to be faithful both in the observance of our Rules and in the occasions of doing good that arise, notwithstanding the dryness and repugnance that occur so often in His service. It seemed to me that the means of acquiring and preserving fidelity to God forever is to hope for it from Him alone, and to ask Him often for it. Another means is not to seek our own satisfaction in the things Divine Providence ordains we should do because, once there were no more consolations, our courage and fidelity might also change.@

AGod bless you, dear Sisters! I'll add to all these thoughts the ones God has given me, poor and wretched though I be. Our first reason for giving ourselves to God wholeheartedly to be faithful to Him is that you=ve given yourselves to Him in the Company with the intention of living and dying in it. You promised this when you entered it, and some of you have even promised solemnly to do so. A second reason is that persons who are faithful in a few things receive from God the reward due to their fidelity. I'm not speaking of great, heroic actions; no, I don't intend to speak of ones like that, Sisters; I'm not talking about being faithful in such great things but I mean to speak about Sisters who are faithful in the least and smallest actions connected with the observance of Rule. It's to these persons that Our Lord made great promises: >Those who are faithful in a few things, I will place over many=;[2] >You have been faithful to me in little things, I will place you over great ones.=[3] What happiness, dear Sisters, for the Daughter

of Charity who will hear these words! *O Seigneur!* how will You treat a Daughter of Charity who doesn't neglect the slightest little Rule, who wants to omit nothing that is prescribed for her? Listen to what He says to such persons: >You have been exact in small things, I am giving you the reward for great ones.= So then, dear Sisters, to be faithful in small things is everything. What does Our Lord promise, even in this world, to Sisters who do that? You won't remain where you are, He says. No, Sisters, He won't leave them in that state but will cause them to go higher, to go from virtue to virtue. If you had six degrees of merit, He'll give you many more. *Quoi*! my God, You'll thus increase Your graces so abundantly for a little fidelity in Your service! It's the Holy Spirit who says in Sacred Scripture that He won't leave such Daughters where they are but will cause them to go higher, that is, will help them to acquire greater perfection. *Jésus,* Sisters! how that should encourage us to great fidelity in all that we do. Think of a Sister who is faithful to rising at the sound of the bell to go to the chapel; she's there only a little before the others, but God is pleased with that short time. Why? Because she's been faithful in a small thing. That's nothing, you'll say to me; it doesn't matter; she was faithful in a trifle. What a great consolation that is for you, Sisters!

AOur blessed Sisters who have died are now receiving the reward of their fidelity. When I hear the lives of the saints read at our house, Sisters, I say to myself, >That's what our Sisters have done.= As for me, I think that, if they did so much good, it was because of their great fidelity to God in the smallest details.

AAfter all these reasons, the last I have to mention, dear Sisters--although I have many others--is, that a crown of heavenly glory is promised to all who are faithful to God. Yes, Sister, it's promised to all of you; it's promised to M. Portail, to Mlle Le Gras, to myself, and, in a word, to all those who will be faithful. What a consolation for all of you, Sisters! But should there be someone among you who would turn her back on God and who lacked this fidelity, that crown wouldn't be for her. So, fear losing this treasure, Sisters, and strive to make yourselves faithful to God in all things without exception, from the small ones to the great ones.

A >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >I=ve persevered for ten years in God's service; I=ve worked for Him for such a long time; must I be faithful to the end in order to have the reward?= Yes, Sisters, you must persevere, or you'll lose everything through your own fault. If on the day of your death you=re found with a single mortal sin, all is lost, all the good you=ve done nursing your patients, the virtues you=ve practiced during your life--all that is lost for you, dear Sisters.

ANow please tell me, if a woman had been faithful to her husband for many years and in the end gave in and lost her honor, would people say that she was faithful? Not at all. And how would her husband deal with her? He=d repudiate her as being unfaithful.

ANow, dear Sisters, you have the happiness to be the spouses of Our Lord; if you were so unfortunate as to fail in your promises--I'm not referring to your body--oh no! I don't mean that, but to your will; what would He say to His servants, He who is so good and who wants to be loved like a spouse? >I am a jealous God,= He said by His prophet. Yes, Sisters, God is jealous of the love of His creatures, whom He created to love Him. >I am a jealous God,= He said, >and I will punish to the fourth generation those who offend me by refusing to give me the love that is due me, and, on the contrary, I will bless even to the hundredth generation those who are faithful to me.=[4] A Sister who doesn't reflect on the fidelity she owes to God begins by neglecting now one thing, now another, and then allows herself to go a little further; on another occasion she thinks it's only a small matter, and in the end she gradually falls into a state of negligence.

A >But, Monsieur,= someone will say to me, >if it should happen that at the end of five or six

years I commit a sin, I'm unfaithful, I no longer love my vocation, I have no fervor in my prayers, nothing touches me, I don't correct my faults and am always falling into the same ones; I'm utterly lost for I have no fidelity.= No, dear Sisters, as long as a Sister has the will to amend and works at this with all her might, even though she may sometimes fall, wounded, she's not unfaithful. However, I'm talking about only those Sisters who fall through weakness, for it's quite another matter for those who fall through malice or willfully. >But,= that Sister will say, >I had kept my Rule for such a long time, I was so attached to even the least of my spiritual practices, and now all that has grown cold.= Is that Sister faithful? Yes, Sisters; when she rises at once after she has fallen, she's faithful, notwithstanding her failings.

A >But, Monsieur,= someone will say to me, >I have to tell you that for a year or perhaps six months, I was so fervent that I would fly, I=d go to serve the poor so willingly, I said such beautiful things to them, I had so much satisfaction in listening to spiritual reading, in speaking of God and in hearing others talk of Him, and everything seemed easy to me. But now things are quite the contrary, for I=ve lost all that; I have no more fervor; I no longer do anything except for form's sake; spiritual reading and conferences don't move me; if I go to serve poor persons, it's only because I have to; if I'm told to do something, I do it only through obedience; if I have to go to Holy Communion I do it only because it's stated in the Rule, for I really don't feel like it. So often I gave such good example, but for the past year I=ve done everything negligently, and I obey and carry out all the other things I have to do so grudgingly that it's sickening to see it. When I'm told to do something, I=d prefer to go for a walk. Consequently, I'm unfaithful. I no longer serve God cheerfully in my vocation. It's much better for me to leave than to deceive God and the world like that.=

AThat's what temptation suggests. Oh no, no, dear Sisters! you=re not unfaithful because of that. You should know that Our Lord is pleased to lead us by those ways after He's strengthened us in His service. In the beginning, God ordinarily gives great delights and consolations to the souls He attracts to himself, but afterward He allows us to be deprived of them and even sometimes to fall into such discouragement that everything that's said or done to us causes us pain, and we take no pleasure in anything, neither in mental prayer, Communion, nor anything else in the world, not even in conversation. In the beginning, then, God gives us great consolations, but afterward it's just the opposite. Note that carefully, Sisters. Consider a Sister who is in a state of dryness; she has no taste for anything, everything displeases her. Is a work less good because you do it reluctantly or without consolation? Oh no, Sisters, on the contrary! it's all the better, since you do it purely for God. In the beginning, God gave you milk, as we do with children, for it is said in Saint Paul, >I gave you milk but I will now give you more solid food.=[5] He gave it to you formerly, dear Sisters, while you were infants, that is, weak in His love; for to babies we give milk and other foods suited to the weakness of their age; but when they have become adults, they=re given hard bread. At the beginning of his conversion, Saint Paul received great consolations, and afterward had dreadful temptations. And did he forsake everything because of that, did he abandon his duties? Oh no! Was he less faithful because of all those temptations? Oh no! Now, dear Sisters, even though you=re in a constant state of dryness and temptation, you are faithful, believe me, provided you don't fail to fulfill your obligations; yes, even though you do them without any feeling--like an animal, if you like--even though everything is repugnant to your nature and you often commit faults; nevertheless, provided you do your duty and raise yourselves up, you are faithful.

AWhen Our Lord was on the cross, in what distress was He? Didn't nature suffer great pangs

because of its repugnance to death? Even though He was well aware that it was for our salvation and the glory of God His Father, He was still pierced with sorrows and afflicted with interior anguish to the point of crying out, >Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?=[6] *Eh bien*! Sisters, don't you see by this example that being disposed to such suffering doesn't prevent us from being faithful to God, since Our Lord didn't fail to remain faithful to God His Father? In the midst of those painful moments, didn't He carry out the wonderful work of our redemption? So, be consoled when you have something to suffer, dear Sisters, knowing that, since you=re Daughters of Charity, you have the means of imitating Our Lord your Spouse, who suffered so greatly, and don't think you=re unfaithful because you=re tempted. Be consoled, too, at your frequent lapses. If you humble yourselves for your falls, you=re not unfaithful. Provided you work at correcting yourselves, persevere, and don't abandon your vocation, you have nothing to fear. However, a Sister who abandons her vocation, who despises her Rules and wants to please herself, indulging herself to her heart's content, that Sister is unfaithful. But the one who does what she can, despite all her loathings, is faithful. And even if it seems to you that you=re bad Daughters of Charity and do nothing worthwhile, Sisters, don't give up, even though you might think you=d do better elsewhere, for it may happen during these times of loathing and temptation, that you may want to go to some other house; that, however, is a deceit of the devil and a very obvious temptation.

AOne day I went to see a great nobleman who had given himself to God in the priesthood. I found him saying his Office and I asked him, >*Eh bien*! Monsieur, are you beginning to taste a little of the happiness there is in serving God?= >Monsieur,= he replied, >I assure you that I find no consolation in it. I say my Office every day; I pray and carry out all my spiritual exercises without any satisfaction at all. But I wouldn't want it otherwise if God didn't will it. It doesn't matter whether I go to God in dryness or lovingly, provided I go to Him faithfully.=

AThink about that, Sisters, and remember this example well, for it's a beautiful one, given by a great nobleman who is still living. So, you see from that, dear Sisters, how differently God treats His servants. In the beginning, He gives them great consolations--at least to some--but afterward, for their own greater good, He permits them to be assailed by great temptations. He makes others walk on thorns. So, as long as you have the determination and the courage to raise yourselves up from your falls, you'll be faithful, Sisters. These are the reasons you have for being faithful to God and the answer to the objections nature might raise. Well now, let's give ourselves to God wholeheartedly to be faithful to Him all our lives.

ALet's go on to the second point of our conference, dear Sisters, which is in what this fidelity consists. You'll understand it by the comparison of a master who has a servant. The former says to the latter, >Go and do such or such a thing; but I want you to do it this way.= And not only does the servant do what his master has ordered, but he does it in the way his master has told him, even though he isn't seen by the master, and he doesn't know whether he'll be paid. Such a servant can be called faithful. If he does what his master ordered, but not in the way he was told, he does it according to his own inclination and whim; that servant isn't faithful. If he receives a reproof from his master, if he resents it, if he thinks he's been given a disconcerting rebuke and leaves his master, then he's a bad, unfaithful servant and mustn't be surprised if his master gives him no reward, since he abandoned him.

AYou can see clearly by this comparison that anyone who doesn't persevere until the end receives no reward. *Quoi*! Sisters, you have the happiness to be God's servants; you=ve left your parents, your possessions, and everything else for God; for you are His servants, if there are any

in the Church. He called you to a way of life in which He has commanded you to do certain things, and He wants you to do them in the way He has prescribed. You do them in the sweetness of consolations; but when temptation arises, you abandon everything. What infidelity that is! Well now, those Sisters among you who do what is in your Rules and are not satisfied with merely doing what the Master commands, but do it as God commands and in the right spirit, are faithful; have no doubt about it. But there are others who, when tempted, give up everything and think they'll do better elsewhere. Should it happen that someone has thoughts of entering a religious Order or of getting married, and toys with the idea, it's one thing if that occurs once, but if the same thoughts recur and she dwells on them as she did before, be greatly afraid for her, Sisters. Afterward, she'll go off and tell her troubles to another Sister--but to whom? Not to her Superioress, still less to the Director,[7] but to a Sister who she knows is discontented and of the same mind as herself. It's to such a one she'll turn to say how she feels and to complain if she's displeased with her Superioress or her Sisters. And the other, who is already ill-disposed, will say to her, >*Quoi*! is it possible that you=ve been treated like that, Sister! How can anyone expect you to put up with that! It's better to leave than always to be that uncomfortable. We could save ourselves elsewhere, and we=re damning ourselves here.= That's what the Sister in whom she confides will say to her; no need to worry that she'll tell her troubles to her Superioress or to other Sisters she knows to be virtuous; she'll make sure not to do that. You'll never see a Sister who's wearied with her vocation turn to a devoted and steadfast companion; they wouldn't agree with her.

AA Sister who puts up with all her troubles without complaining or mentioning them to others, unless to her Superioress, and continues to do her duty, although she has no taste for it and is tempted by the devil, such a Sister is faithful. Fidelity consists in this: doing what God commands and in the way He commands, not telling your troubles either to your Sisters or to outsiders, for you mustn't do that. So, Sisters, as long as you observe the Rules of the Motherhouse, rest assured that you=re faithful. Sisters who act otherwise than what is laid down in the Rule, and what the Superioress tells them, are not faithful; they=re in the Company in body only; the spirit isn't there. It's not enough, then, to do good; you must also do it in the way prescribed. And how happy will be those who persevere to the end in this fidelity!

AThose poor Sisters in Poland have great need of this fidelity and of reflecting that it's God who has called them. There they are, in a foreign country, by the guidance of Providence. What is God's plan, Sisters, if not that they might become apostles of Poland? And what graces has not God bestowed on those Sisters, whom He has destined for the service of the poor people of an entire kingdom? You=re about to see.

AHe gave one of them the strength to resist a temptation she had, and He did so because she was faithful. A proposal was made to her to remain with the Queen, who wanted to place her in a ministry that wouldn't take her away from the service of poor persons, but would keep her nearer Her Majesty than the works Sisters ordinarily do. And it was God's Will, in these circumstances, to give a Daughter of Charity the grace to refuse the Queen. Do you know how? By her tears, Sisters, by her tears. When the Queen saw her crying, she said, >*Eh quoi*! Sister, don't you want to serve me!= >Forgive me, Madame,= she said, >but we have given ourselves to the poor,= showing by these few words that she loved nothing as much as the poverty of a Daughter of Charity, and by that this Sister showed that she understood clearly the grandeur of the service of the poor. What a grace God has given all of them to have witnessed this example, Sisters, and which He still gives them every day! I know more about this than you could imagine. Well now,

blessed be God!

ALet's go on to the third point, which concerns the means of acquiring and of always preserving the fidelity we owe to God. As Mademoiselle has stated, we must, first of all, ask God often for this grace and be grateful for His favors. In speaking of this fidelity, Job says that we=re under an obligation to God because He has made us rational creatures. Not only that, but He preserves us every moment in the state of existence He's given us. And you can say, Sisters, >It's God who made me and who, at every moment, preserves me. He could have made me an animal, a demented person, or someone with another disability, yet in His goodness He made me as I am, capable of meriting the possession of Him one day in paradise, which I hope to do with His grace. It was for that reason that, when I least thought of it, He came to seek me out and draw me to himself to be His spouse and to serve Him in the Company of the Daughters of Charity.=

AFurthermore, God died for us, and by His death He has given us His Blood, which He shed for love of us, and His glory, which He has promised us in eternity. Ah! Sisters, if there were no other reason than the thought that >God died for us,= that would suffice to induce us to be faithful to Him. But even more, God goes on preparing crowns for us every day; yes, dear Sisters, there are crowns awaiting us.

AThe second means is to do the opposite of Sisters who corrupt one another by their conversations and are so cowardly as to give in to their temptations. For what does a Sister do who fails to persevere? I=ve already said something about that. As soon as the temptation arises, she listens to it and reasons with it, thinking, >Maybe I=d be better off in a certain religious Order or working as a servant; my mind would be more at rest.= She turns over these ideas in her mind, and afterward, if she knows a Sister who is ill-disposed and of the same mind as she is, she goes to tell her the reason for her discontent. The other will say, >You=re right, Sister. *Quoi*! you, to do such a thing! There's no way we can remain in such a state forever; we=d do better to go elsewhere, join some religious Order or get married; perhaps we=d save ourselves better there than by staying here with our minds always in a state of distraction. Marriage is holy; the Blessed Virgin was married; what harm would we be doing?= If the thought of marriage shocks her and the idea of a religious Order returns, she'll go find a religious she knows and say to him, >Father, I'm a Daughter of Charity; I=ve been upset for some time now; I'm constantly mistreated; I can't stand it any longer; please advise me as to whether I can't leave and enter a religious Order.= That priest, who doesn't know you, nor what your vocation is, nor the good you do by serving in the Company the members of Jesus Christ, will ask you, >Have you made a perpetual vow?= When you answer, >No,= he'll continue: >Then go, Sister, you can do it, because you=ve made no vow that might hold you back. Since you=ve suffered so long and this anxiety isn't going away, then leave.= That's the advice he'll give you; how could you expect anything else? He knows the Company only from what you=ve told him--which is inaccurate--and can talk to you only in accordance with his own spirit, which is that of a member of a religious Order, but this spirit isn't suitable for you, however good it may be for those who have been called to it by God.

ASo, remember what I=ve already told you on many occasions, Sisters: don't take any advice from your confessors with regard to your conduct; you have to tell them your sins, not get spiritual direction from them. A layman who goes to confession is satisfied with telling his sins to the priest and nothing more. Do you think he asks for advice about his business? Oh no! that isn't done. If he needs advice, he gets it from persons who understand business matters and not from his confessor.

ASo, what is to be done when you have temptations, Sisters? Oh yes! you must have recourse to your Superiors at once. They are the ones to whom God gives the gift of advising you. Tell your sins to your confessors, but reveal your temptations to Mademoiselle, M. Portail, or myself; and state things as they are; make no excuses. You often see what is done to cure bodily ailments; nothing is concealed; the patient tells the physician everything to get some relief; he's not satisfied with saying that he doesn't feel well, but goes into detail: >Monsieur, I have a pain here and a pain there; and this still hurts me.=

AAct in a similar way for your spiritual ailments, and you'll get some relief. Listen to the advice given you as coming from God; and if your temptation recurs, again make known your troubles to the Director at the Motherhouse or to the Directress. Perhaps God will allow them to give you some advice that will console you; or, should He leave you with the temptation, it's doubtless because He wants you to be tempted for your greater good. Be consoled, dear Sisters; I hope that as long as you act in this way you'll remain faithful to God and pleasing to Our Lord.

ASince, to receive the influences of the head, the members have to remain united to the body, likewise, dear Sisters, as long as you are united to your head, you'll share in the influences God communicates to the whole body; but if you go elsewhere you'll make yourselves unworthy of this benefit. If my arm were amputated, it would no longer share the influences of my body; thus, a Sister separated from the body of the Company no longer shares in what it does. As long as you remain united to your head, dear Sisters, you'll be faithful to your vocation, but if you go elsewhere, turning to some religious, you won't have the life of your spirit. Be consoled, then, dear Sisters, and be faithful in following your heads, who are your Superiors, and rest assured that you will have the crown. That's what I wish for all of you.

AAnd while I'm preparing to give you the blessing and am asking God to grant you and me, a wretched sinner, the grace to be faithful to Him, call to mind all the acts you=ve made while we were talking. I thank Him for having called you to be Daughters of Charity; in the name of Mademoiselle, M. Portail, and myself, I thank Him that we=ve been called to serve you. And while I pronounce the words of blessing, humble yourselves before God, and ask Him for the grace to make good use of all that we=ve just said. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

55. - THE PRACTICE OF ASKING PERMISSION

July 27, 1653

ADear Sisters, the subject of the present conference is divided into three points: first, the advantage of doing nothing without the permission of Superiors; second, the great troubles that will come to Daughters of Charity when they fail to ask permission; third, the principal faults that may be committed against this practice of doing nothing without permission; and fourth, the means to be taken to observe this practice well, or to maintain ourselves in it when we have already begun it.

AThis is one of the most important topics we=ve treated with you, dear Sisters. May the Savior of our souls grant you the grace to enter into these practices and to live in conformity with what you=re about to hear!

ATell me, Sister, what advantage does a Daughter of Charity and the whole Company derive from the practice of doing nothing without the permission of its Superiors?@

AFather, I'm not smart enough to understand that, but it seemed to me that a Sister who is obedient must be assured of persevering in her vocation. And as the Son of God was obedient all His life until death, we must consider it a great honor to imitate Him in that. Furthermore, without obedience all we have is worry and unrest.@

ASister, there's a difference between obedience and the subject now before us; we=re dealing with the question of doing nothing without permission. It's up to you to ask permission. Obedience presupposes a command; it consists in doing what has been ordered; it begins with the person who gives the command, but the practice we=re now discussing begins with the person who asks the permission. You=ve stated very well, Sister, that an obedient Daughter will persevere in her vocation, for there's no reason to hope that a Sister from the Charity can persevere without obedience. Here it's a question of giving the reasons why a Daughter of Charity should always ask permission of her Superiors.

AYou, Sister, what have you to say about it?@

AFather, obedience will bring us great peace of mind because, when we=ve asked permission, we know that it's God's Will that we do such or such a thing.@

AGod bless you, Sister! Note that, Sisters, remember it well. Sister has said that to do nothing without obedience is to do the Will of God, and she added that this practice always makes us happy. No one in the world is as happy as those who live under obedience, and I see only remorse of conscience in those who fail in obedience. So, there are two things that submission brings us: great peace of mind and the grace to do God's Will. Now, you see, dear Sisters, to do the Will of God is to begin our paradise in this world. Give me a person, give me a Sister, who does God's Will all her life; she begins her paradise here on earth, for she has no other will than the Will of God, and that is sharing in the happiness of the blessed.

AWhat advantages come from obedience, Sister?@

AI couldn't add anything to what our Sisters have already said, Father; but it also seems to me that this gives great consolation to Superiors.@

AWell, Sister! so you think it's a great satisfaction for Superiors to see that their subjects are obedient?@

AYes, Father, I see that both Superiors and subjects receive great consolation from it.@

ADo you want to live like that, Sister, and does it seem to you that it would be a great benefit to see the entire Company observe this practice--which I think it does, by the grace of God?@

AYes, Father, that gives great consolation.@

AAh yes, Sisters! One of my greatest consolations is to know that the Company does nothing without permission, and that's the reward God gives--if He gives any in this world--to Superiors. I=ve had this reward sometimes. I shouldn't speak about myself, poor sinner and wretched man that I am. I was once a country Pastor[1] (a pretty miserable Pastor!). I had such good people, who were so obedient in doing what I asked of them that, when I told them they should come to confession on the first Sunday of the month, they didn't fail to do it. They came to confession, and I saw from day to day the progress these souls were making. That gave me so much consolation, and I was so pleased with it, that I used to say to myself, >*Mon Dieu*! how happy you are to have such good people!= And I would add, >I don't think the Pope himself is as happy as a Pastor in the midst of such good-hearted people.= And one day Cardinal de Retz[2] asked me, >*Eh bien*! Monsieur, how are you?= I said to him, >Your Eminence, I can't tell you how happy I am.= >Why?= he asked. >Because I have such good people, so obedient to all that I tell them that it seems to me that neither the Holy Father nor you, Eminence, are as happy as I am.= Yes, Sisters, when a man sees his flock advancing in the way of obedience, he's wonderfully consoled.

ASister,@ said M. Vincent, Awhat advantages come from obedience?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that the virtue of obedience is never alone, for as a rule it's accompanied by many other virtues, especially humility, the love of God, and many others.@

AThat's well stated, Sister; obedience is never alone, for along with it you'll find the fear of God, love of the neighbor and of our vocation, and all the other virtues. Don't you see, on the contrary, the truth of this, dear Sisters? Give me a Sister who isn't obedient. Observe her closely. You'll find that's she's wanting in everything and has no virtue--no love of God, since this love isn't strong enough to make her ask permission for what has to be done. Lastly, as our Sister has said, being obedient is an important sign, and a very clear one, of great virtue. On the other hand, disobedience is the sign of a lack of virtue.

ASister, would a layperson be scandalized if he asked a Sister to go to a particular place, to do a certain thing for him, and she replied, >I=d really like to do it, Monsieur, but I can't do it without permission=? And if someone gave you some linen, a prayer book, or suchlike things, do you think he=d be offended if you didn't accept it without permission?@

ANo, Father, on the contrary, it would give him good example.@

AAnd if someone were to give you some shoes, a rosary, or something else, do you think you should accept them?@

ANo, I don=t, Father.@

AIf you were urged to accept, you should say, >Monsieur, I don't take anything without permission.= Do you think that would disedify him? On the contrary, people would be filled with admiration to see poor Sisters living like that because there's something divine in it. Believe me, dear Sisters, if anything keeps the Company together, it's the fact that our dear Sisters who are in heaven were faithful to this practice. If a Sister says, >I don't always need to ask permission when I accept this or that; it's only a trifle,= do you think she's doing the Will of God and can persevere in her vocation?@

ANo, Father, on the contrary, that's a great way to lose it.@

ARight you are, Sister. The Company is like the sea, which can't retain a dead body; it has to cast it up because it can't tolerate corruption. If, in a Company, someone wants to live her own life, that is, to follow her own will, she's dead and the Company can't tolerate her; God and the angel of the Company cast her out; that's the touchstone.

ADo you agree with that? If a Sister receives and reads a letter without giving it to her Superioress, or sends one without permission, do you think she's content?@

ANo, Father.@

AOh! certainly not, Sisters! And you, Sister, do you think laypersons are scandalized if they see a Daughter of Charity who is unwilling to accept or do anything without permission of her Superiors?@

ANo, Father; on the contrary, they=re edified by it.@

ASisters, is that the way you see it?@ All the Sisters stood up and answered, AYes, Father.@

AIf you do, are you willing that we give ourselves to God, both you and I, to do nothing without the permission of our Superiors? And don't you acknowledge that Sisters who are unwilling to do anything without permission give good example to the whole Company and greatly console their Superiors?@

AYes, Father.@

ADon't you want to act in that way?@

AYes, Father.@

AGod bless you, Sisters!

ASo those are two of our points. We still have to consider the faults a person can commit against this practice. Sister, what are the principal faults we can commit against this practice?@

AIt seems to me, as our Sisters have said, Father, that we can fail in everything.@

AYou see, Sisters, there are some things for which you don't need to ask permission; these are the ones prescribed by the Rules; for everything else you should ask permission because the Rule itself forbids you to do anything without permission. Everything you do to carry out your Rules is done with permission, whether you rise in the morning or go to your meals or the examination of conscience. God calls you there, and when you go you=re acting through obedience. For example, take the bell that rings and says to you, >Get up, Sisters.= By that, God's Will is made known to you. The Sisters who rise are doing God's Will, but the ones who stay in bed, even though the Rule is calling them, must have permission. If they foresee on the previous evening that they need to rest, they must ask Mademoiselle's permission; and in that way they obey by staying in bed. The Sisters in the parishes have to go to the Sister Servant and say, >Sister, may I please stay in bed a little longer?= If it's the Sister Servant, she'll say to her companion, >Sister, I think I need to rest,= and the Sister will reply, >All right, Sister.=

ATell me, Sister, does a Sister who needs to eat something outside of mealtime and does so without permission go against God's Will?@

AYes, she does, Father. The Sister who was on mission with me used to say it was a sin against the virtue of temperance; when she thought I needed something, she encouraged me to eat, but she herself, in similar circumstances, was unwilling to take anything.@

AThat's really beautiful. What a good Sister Servant! But, Sister, are you obeying when you eat something after asking permission?@

AYes, Father.@

ADoes a Sister do wrong if, in order to give herself greater freedom to talk, won't go to the first sitting for meals? For you=re all supposed to be there except the Officers, who can't be present because of their duties.@

AYes, Father, she disobeys the Rule; and the freedom she wants to take is an additional wrong.@

ABut, Sister, if, for some reason she doesn't go, after having asked the permission, does she do the Will of God?@

AYes, she does, Father.@

ASo then, according to our Sister, three things may be done contrary to the Rule: not to rise at the sound of the bell, to eat outside of mealtimes, and to be unwilling to go to the first sitting for meals. Well now, Sister, I ask you, would a Sister who wanted to buy something, such as a prayer book, a rosary, and the like, without permission, be acting contrary to the Rule?@

AYes, Father.@

AAnd if someone gave her a present, should she accept it without permission?@

ANo, Father.@

ACould she do so with permission?@

AYes, Father. One time I accepted without permission a book from a good Pastor, who gave it to me. However, I did tell my Sister. I won't do it again, Father.@

ANo, Sister, don't do it again. Think how much you would have edified that good Pastor if you had declined to accept his book and told him you had to have permission. Anyone who saw

you acting like that would be converted if she were bad, and reach the sixth degree of virtue if she had reached five already.

ASister, would it be wrong to give away your money, if you had any?@

AYes, it would, Father.@

AAnd you, Sister, is it a fault to receive or to give away money from a relative or acquaintance?@

AYes, Father.@

AOh yes, Sisters! for poverty dictates that we shouldn't have anything contrary to the Rule.@

The Sister who had spoken previously stood up and said, AFather, when I was in the country, people sometimes used to give us grain.@

ABut, did you need it, Sister?@

AYes, Father, we didn't have any.@

AIn that case, Sister, you acted correctly; but if you had some, you=d have done wrong by taking it.@

AFather, when one of the Ladies comes back from a journey, she may say, >Sister, here's a rosary I=ve brought you; please accept it.= Since she's not poor but a lady, would it be wrong to take it?@

AYes, it would, Sister; you mustn't take it, and don't be afraid of offending her; on the contrary, people will have a high opinion of you because they trust you; they give you money to be distributed to the poor. These Ladies will have greater confidence in you; they'll say, >How could these Sisters take something from the poor, since they=re unwilling to accept anything without permission.=

AAnd you, Sister, does a Sister who receives and opens letters without the permission of her Superiors act contrary to obedience?@

AYes, she does, Monsieur.@

ASo, it's wrong to write or to receive letters without showing them?@

AI think so, Father.@

AGive yourselves to God for that, for it's the gate of perdition for Daughters of Charity, especially because, if you don't show your letters, that's a sign they contain some complaint or something you don't want to be seen; consequently, something that's not good. *O Sauveur*! how many men I have in our house who have kept letters for two or three days rather than open them!

ASister, is it right to pay a visit, now to one relation, now to another, and to ask them to pay you a return visit?@

ANo, it isn=t, Father.@

AI don't think that ever happens here, Sisters. If it did, you=d be despised by the persons you might visit in that way.

AAnd you, Sister, does a Sister who buys dainty shoes, or has someone make her a quilted bodice, or buys gloves, and lets her hair show, act in conformity with obedience?@

ANo, Father.@

AThose Sisters who would like to have dainty shoes or a quilted bodice already have one foot out of the Company, Sisters. Don't desire to have anything the others don't have; for, if you have something that's not in common usage in the Motherhouse, you make yourselves conspicuous.

AAnd you, Sister, if a Sister learns to read or write or to do bloodletting without permission, is she going against God's Will?@

AYes, Father, she is.@

AYes, Sister, she's acting contrary to the Will of God, who doesn't want a Sister to take it upon herself to do anything whatsoever contrary to obedience, but rather to act in conformity with what she is told to do.

AYou see, dear Sisters, you can't all be alike; some are suitable for nursing the sick, others for schools. It's up to Superiors to decide what you=re suited for. All of you aren't qualified to let blood, for there are some whose hands are too clumsy. Everyone's fingers aren't the same, so you can't all do the same thing.

AIt's said in Saint Paul, >Some prophesy, others are Apostles or evangelize,=[3] and God is pleased to see this variety both in spiritual and in temporal things. So, Sisters, be satisfied with your ministries, and may no one take on anything except by obedience. If a Sister who is apt for teaching wanted to learn how to let blood, perhaps she wouldn't be suitable for that and might spoil everything. Please God that, for having let blood without knowing how, you haven't harmed anyone, caused any serious accidents, or killed someone!

ADoes a Sister who would like to change her confessor, perform acts of mortification and penance, or recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin sin against obedience?@

AYes she does, Father, for she's ruining herself.@

ADon't do it, Sisters! Nothing should be done without the permission of the confessor who will be sent here or of Mademoiselle. God bless you!

ASister, suppose a Sister requests something of Superiors but doesn't get it. She goes away angry and says to herself, >I'll never ask for anything again; I=ve been refused; I don't intend to ask for anything again.= What sort of spirit animates her, Sister?@

AThe spirit of pride.@

AYou=re quite right: the spirit of arrogance. Such a diabolical word, the daughter of pride, should never be spoken. God grant that it may never be heard among you! If your request is refused, it's because it's not good for you, or it's to test you. That's why you must continue to ask. How do you know whether you'll be given permission tomorrow for what you=ve been refused today?

AShould you go to Holy Communion without permission?[4] No, you mustn't do that. May you forego it on your own? You mustn't do that either. What should you do to request that and to get permission to take the discipline? I certainly approve of all of you having a discipline, but I also approve of your not using it without permission.

ABut you may say to me, >Monsieur, you=re telling us many things about this--many, many things; but won't our Superiors be weary of our asking permission for so many things?= No, Sisters, you'll never weary your Superiors; on the contrary, they'll be greatly consoled to see a Sister who does nothing without permission. As for your Rules, you have permission to follow them, and there's no need to ask permission for what is contained in them; but you do have to ask for anything else. When Sisters in a parish hear that a sermon is being preached in some place of devotion, they may not go there without permission from the Sister Servant. The Sister Servant herself must ask her Sister's permission. For matters of greater importance, the parish Sisters must come to ask Mademoiselle's permission, and Sisters in the rural areas must write for it.

AYou'll say to me, >Supposing I ask a general permission for all the necessary things, Monsieur?= You have to be very careful not to do that, and we have to take care not to grant it, because you wouldn't have the merit that's found in asking for each permission individually.

AI also have to tell you that some Sisters worm out permissions. These are the small-minded people who are perturbed and anxious if no attention is paid to them. It's wrong to force a permission. Always ask with indifference, and never insist if you see that it's difficult to grant it to you. Say to yourselves, >If I'm granted it, fine; but if I'm refused, perhaps it will be to humble me.= God said to Moses, >It's true that you gave them permission, but it was because of the hardness of their hearts.=[5] In the same way, a Sister is sometimes given permission when it's clear that she's incapable of being guided by the voice of reason.

AYou'll ask me, >Can't a confessor in the parish where I live give me permission to perform some act of penance?= No, he can=t. His jurisdiction doesn't extend to that; he has power only to hear your confession; as for Communion, he can give you permission to receive it or he can forbid you to do so.

AWell now, what will we do to practice this well, dear Sisters? If you ever had an important conference, it's this one. I'm well aware that most of you observe this practice, but I ask all of you to do so; if you do, you will all be carrying out God's Will on earth as the angels do it in heaven, and you'll enjoy unimaginable peace and tranquillity of mind. The senior Sisters especially should give the example in this; for, if they allow themselves to act without permission, the younger ones will imitate them, thinking that there's no harm in it. If, on the contrary, they=re faithful to asking permission, they'll edify the younger ones and their neighbor and will experience great consolation, instead of the strange, inconceivable distress they=d have of failing in this and giving disedification.

ASupposing that's the case, the first means to be taken is to reflect often, >I'm beginning a happy life, which I'll continue in heaven.= As a second means, get in the habit of mortifying yourselves. You mortify yourselves by not doing your own will, which might want to go sometimes here, sometimes there. You have to overcome such inclinations and be firmly attached to obedience. In the third place, ask God constantly for this grace. There's nothing easier than to ask permission for what you want to do. Politeness alone demands that.

AWell now, *mon Sauveur*! these are more or less the means you must take to ground yourselves solidly in this practice, dear Sisters. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to let you see and know that this is one of the most important conferences we=ve ever had. I ask His Divine Goodness to establish us firmly in this practice, as He did for our dear Sisters who are now in the state of the blessed. Let's endeavor to imitate them, particularly in this practice, by which the whole Company will be very edified.

AO Savior of our souls, You who have listened to what has been said and who were yourself so obedient as to prefer death to disobedience, may it please Your Divine Goodness, by the obedience of which You gave us the example when You were on earth, to grant us the obedience we need in order not to do anything contrary to the glory of God! And because we need His grace, dear Sisters, I ask you to offer God your next Communion to obtain from Him the grace never to do anything contrary to this practice. In this way you'll have no reason to envy the Carmelites, because you'll be as happy as they are and will give as much honor to God in the state to which you=ve been called as they do in theirs.

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts?@

AFather, I have nothing to add to what Your Charity has said, except that I=ve always observed that all this is very true and that all those who have left the Company did so because of no other reason than an attachment to their own will and to all those characteristics.@

ASo, you=re saying, Mademoiselle, that Sisters who have left the Company and lost their

vocation did so because they followed their own will and didn't do what we just mentioned. You speak volumes in those few words. Remember well what Mademoiselle has just said, Sisters; it's very important; and don't act like those who have left, but enter into this practice of obedience with the assurance that it's the work of salvation that will lead you into the eternal sanctuaries. Please be very devoted to saying these words frequently, *Fiat voluntas tua,*[6] during prayer, when you hear the word of God, as a testimony that you=re subject to His Will in all things.@

Then Most Honored Father knelt down and added, ADear Sisters, this is the prayer I am addressing to Our Lord, and I ask Him once again that, as I am pronouncing the words of blessing, He may make us capable of doing His holy Will--both you and me, a miserable sinner, who have never done anything but my own will--and that He may pour into your hearts the grace of never doing anything without permission either of the Rule or of Superiors. I ask Him for this with all my heart. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

56. - TO THE SISTERS WHO WERE SENT TO NANTES

November 12, 1653

On Wednesday, November 12, 1653, the three Sisters mentioned earlier[1] left Paris for Nantes, and this is the exhortation given them by Most Honored Father.

ADear Sisters, God has chosen you to go to the Nantes Hospital, and you must give yourselves entirely to Our Lord, since He has chosen you from among all the others. You have three reasons for giving yourselves to God to carry out well your ministry there.

AThe first reason, dear Sisters, is the general reason that obliges each and every one of us to renounce ourselves to do the Will of Our Lord with the result that we'll never do our own.

AThe second is that you=re going to a large hospital, where there's more work to be done than in some other place. It's not like being in a parish in Paris, where you have to care for only a small number of patients, nor like country places, where you have only to visit and instruct the poor. Things are quite different there, and that's why you must give yourselves to God so that He will grant you the graces you need.

AThe third reason I felt necessary to mention, dear Sisters, is that, by the instigation of the evil spirit, there is division in that hospital. Yes, Sisters, the devil has been powerful enough to use his wiles to sow discord among our Sisters, and you will remedy this by the union and harmony that will exist among you. Don't be surprised that the devil has caused this bitter battle, for he usually aims his resentment especially at God's servants, both men and women; he attacks the holiest Companies with the hatred he bears them. He doesn't worry much about certain individuals, because they=re already his, but the houses consecrated to the service of God and united by the bond of charity, Sisters, that's where he sows discord. So, Sisters, you are going to remedy the disorders this evil spirit has caused in this hospital.

AAnd what will you do to achieve this? Sisters, it's essential for you to know that the higher the state of a person, the greater virtue she must show. The title of Daughter of Charity that you bear obliges you to the highest perfection to which a person can aspire; therefore, people expect it of you. Moreover, you=ve been chosen to go to the assistance of persons who have been wounded. You know that when people go to war they take up arms; they fight one another; some are killed, others wounded; some are conquerors, the others conquered. Our poor Sisters have been wounded in the war our enemy has waged against them. Don't despise them on that account. They=re very virtuous, but this divisive enemy has waged a cruel battle against them with the permission of God, who has willed to give us good reason to humble ourselves by showing us that no one is exempt, and to teach us that He doesn't always send afflictions as a

punishment, but to test His servants. One day the devil threatened Saint Francis: >Your religious,= he said to him, >are at peace just now; but a day will come when I'll test them properly, and that will be when persons of rank enter the Order.= And that's what he did, Sisters. So, don't be surprised if the demon has attacked our Sisters, since he certainly dared to do the same in Our Lord's own company.

AI had to warn you about these things, dear Sisters, so that you might arm yourselves with the virtues needed to bring down this enemy and this spirit of division. Those who go to war carry weapons. Your weapons are humility, gentleness, and condescension. When you have these virtues, you'll be armed from head to toe, prepared to do battle with the enemy. Condescension is a powerful means of preserving union among persons who have given themselves to God; all of you must have this virtue, dear Sisters, and renounce your own will as often as your Sisters hold opinions different from yours; for a Daughter of Charity must be ready to do or not to do whatever the Sister Servant orders or forbids her to do. I say the *Sister Servant*, because you should pay no heed to what another Sister says, when her advice tends to the contrary. For, if people were willing to listen to everyone, they=d do nothing worthwhile. Do what the Sister Servant says and never what Jacquette, Marie, or anyone else may say, once the Sister Servant has given an order. That's the true means of being united, as true servants of God must be. Otherwise, everything is in a state of disorder. One has one opinion; another has another. Not that we should spurn the advice of our Sisters; oh no! but those who give it must be indifferent as to whether their advice is followed or not.

AThe Bishop of Geneva used to say, >I prefer to do the will of others than to make someone else comply with mine; and I=d rather adapt my will to that of a hundred persons than to force that of a single person to agree with mine.= See how well this blessed man teaches us the practice of condescension, Sisters, and how necessary it is among you. A great saint used to say that to attain perfection we must lay aside our own will and that nothing else is needed to reach perfection. These are the arms with which we send you off, dear Sisters, to vindicate our Sisters by the good example you'll give. Everyone expects that of you, and the fragrance emanating from those beautiful virtues will have as a result that you will not bear the name of Daughters of Charity in vain.

AYou'll be dealing with the Fathers of the Poor[2] there, and in general with all those who have any responsibility concerning the poor. You'll pay them all possible honor and respect. A few priests are in residence at the hospital. It's a little difficult to tell you how to act toward them because they may want to have different food than the Fathers of the Poor allow. They=re complaining that the Sisters don't feed them as they desire. That's a little awkward, Sisters, and is the source of part of the trouble and disorder. But, no matter what is said to you, and even though the priests may want to have different and better food than the Fathers of the Poor allow, don't give in, stand fast and do nothing contrary to the orders of Superiors. Try to condescend to those boarders and to satisfy them verbally as best you can. If the Fathers of the Poor say to you, >Such a thing must be done,= and the priests want you to do otherwise, you should do what the Fathers wish.

AThere's also the Bishop of Nantes.[3] He is saying that you=re nuns because someone told him that you make vows. If he speaks to you about them, tell him you=re not nuns. Sister Jeanne,[4] who is the Sister Servant, said to him, >Excellency, the vows we take don't make us nuns, because they=re simple vows that may be taken anywhere, even in the world.=

AAs a matter of fact, people can't say that the Daughters of Charity are nuns, because they

couldn’t be Daughters of Charity if they were, since a person must be cloistered in order to be a nun. The Daughters of Charity can never be nuns, and woe betide anyone who speaks of making them nuns!

ASo go then, dear Sisters; work hard for Our Lord, hold our dear Sisters in high regard and respect them, and be very careful not to have a poor opinion of any of them. In a word, let it be evident that you have the true spirit that God wants you to have. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .* @

57. - HOW TO ACT WHEN AWAY FROM THE MOTHERHOUSE

January 1, 1654

ADear Sisters, the subject of this conference is divided into three points. The first deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity should know clearly how to act when they=re outside the Motherhouse, both with regard to those under whom they work and with one another, in hospitals as well as in the villages and in the parishes of Paris; the second point concerns the faults Daughters of Charity may commit in ministries outside the house; and the third concerns the means they can use to act as true Daughters of Charity, when they=re engaged in the service of poor persons in hospitals, as well as in the villages and the parishes of Paris.

AUltimately, dear Sisters, and in a word, we=re talking about how Daughters of Charity should act outside the Motherhouse, at the Foundling Hospital, at the Nom-de-Jésus,[1] with the galley convicts, etc. To tell the truth, this is a very broad topic. It’s impossible to touch on everything, for it would be necessary to say how you should act with parish priests, the Ladies, and other persons with whom you minister. Today we’ll talk in a general manner about a few of the more important points.

ASister, is it important to know clearly how to act when outside the Motherhouse?@

AYes, Father, for if we don=t, serious disorders may arise; we might say and do things quite contrary to the spirit of the Company. It may also happen that, through our own fault, because of ignorance of our obligations, poor persons may not be provided with all that they need.@

AAnd you, Sister, what did you think on the subject of this conference?@

AFather, we can’t have the spirit of the Company or perform our actions in conformity with it, if we don’t know what it is.@

ANow, Sister, it’s your turn to tell us your thoughts.@

AFather, it seems to me that, in order to fulfill our obligations, we have to be very careful to recall the instructions we=re given at the Motherhouse and be exact in observing them; if we fail in this, I think we are offending God.@

M. Vincent asked another Sister if it’s necessary to know how to act at the Foundling Hospital, the Nom-de-Jésus, and other places. AYes, Father,@ she replied, Abecause we can’t have the spirit of the Company if we don’t know what our Rules teach us; and in order to keep them we must follow exactly the advice our Superiors give us.@

AGod bless you, Sister! You see, Sisters, I’m sure everyone knows how important it is for a Sister to be well informed about what she has do when she is sent somewhere. The Ladies expect it; they=re relieved when they see a Sister well instructed in everything; poor persons also are happy about this, better taught, and better served. That’s why you have to be so careful, Sisters, because it’s very important for each and every one of you here to be well informed of everything you=re obliged to know, and for you to take great care to remember all that you’ll be told. And because you can’t stay here very long, you have to be more attentive to what is told you during the short time you=re here.

AAt Sainte-Marie[2] the Sisters spend seven years in the novitiate, even though they may be faultless, in order to be well instructed about what God is asking of them. But you are like ripe fruit because you don't have the time you need to be instructed. How is it then that, with so little experience, you do so much good, unless it's because God's grace is so great, the Company is just starting and, consequently, has--and should have--much greater fervor than at another time? You'll do incomparably more now than fifty years from now because grace is given abundantly in beginnings. In the early Church the fervor and charity of the first Christians were admirable; they had but one heart and one will; and with that fervor they worked wonders, converted souls, and encouraged one another to endure all kinds of torments, even martyrdom. That's the fervor of beginners who want to serve God wholeheartedly. They=re strong and courageous in doing all that's pleasing to God. When wine is put into a cask, it foams and bubbles and is so strong that it would burst the barrel if air weren't introduced into it. In the same way, at the beginning of the Company, with the abundant grace found in it, you'll do more in three months than you would in six years at another time.

AI'm going to talk to you about this, dear Sisters. I know quite well that if I questioned you, you=d tell me some beautiful things, but time is pressing us; therefore, I'll tell you succinctly what you should do. One of the main things is to know your Rules well. That's a general principle. Coming down to particulars, Sister Servants must take great care to know all that concerns their office; the Sister here who is in charge of instructing you will take the time to explain this to you; otherwise, you'll make some big mistakes. The second means is to edify everyone and to be very cordial with one another so that, even though you=re not together, some being in the rural areas, others in parishes, people will see that there's only one heart among you. Let there be no division, but the same affection, the same esteem of virtue, the same horror of evil. You see, Sisters, you have to work especially at that; otherwise, you=d always be starting over and would never have any rest or peace among yourselves.

AWhy is that? I'm going to tell you why. It's because we change every day, and our poor nature is never in the same state. Job says that man is never in the same state. He's like a wheel that's forever turning and never stops. You see from this how important it is for you to practice mortification while you=re here in this house. You should have great regard for it in all your actions because of the inconstancy of our nature, which sometimes wants one thing and sometimes another; is mortified now and, in a moment, is immortified. We mustn't trust ourselves because we=re constantly changing; that's why we need to reflect often on ourselves in order to make amends for the failings our corrupt nature causes us to commit. Just as a clock has to be wound every day to rectify any loss of time, we must always start over in practicing mortification of our passions because we always need to be working on ourselves from one minute to the next.

ASuppose you=re with a Sister; no matter how fervent she is, the devil and nature will still tempt her, with the result that sometimes she'll seem to you to be in a bad mood. But don't think she's imperfect on that account, and don't have a poor opinion of her because that comes from the corrupt nature of our first father. Oh no! Sisters, don't allow an unkind thought to enter your head about such a Sister. Should it happen that you feel some aversion or disdain for her, squelch that thought at once and say to yourself, >Wicked thought, against whom do you have it? *Quoi*! against your Sister, against the spouse of Jesus Christ, against the life of your life! I'll do the opposite of what this bad thought suggests, by going to embrace this Sister and being cordial to her. If I=ve said an unkind word to her, I'll ask her forgiveness, saying, Aplease forgive me,

Sister; With God's grace, I hope I'll never do that again, and I ask you to bear with me.@ = Don't be surprised if that's repugnant to nature, on account of the pain there is in humbling ourselves and because the devil butts in, doing his utmost to dissuade us from doing it.

ABe very courageous, Sisters, and act like the children of Israel who were building the Lord's temple. In one hand, they held the stones, and in the other a sword to defend themselves against their enemies. So, you see, dear Sisters, you must do likewise because, at the same time we=re working at the edifice of our perfection, the devil and nature are opposing it and waging a powerful war against us. You have to take up the sword of mortification, the discipline, fasting, and write to Superiors when you=re living far away. If you do this, Sisters, what will happen? You'll live everywhere as in paradise, for you'll be in God, and you'll have paradise on earth. On the contrary, if you don=t, you'll be living, if not in a hell, at least in a purgatory. So, Sisters, those are two means: the first is to have good knowledge of your Rules and the second is to have great forbearance with one another.

AThe third means is to win the love of everyone by the example of your good life. The fine reputation you have has led to your being asked for in several places. And why is that? Because they=ve seen a little of the flower of your charity. I=ve received another letter from a Bishop, who is asking for you. If it's like this now, Sisters, what will it be when you have improved? *O mon Dieu*! let's humble ourselves profoundly for that, and if people want you so much now, while you=re still imperfect, how much more will you be in demand when God has given you the grace to attain greater perfection!

AThe fourth means is to give yourselves to God so as never to find fault with the overall administration of the Company or the particular guidance of the Sister Servant, but to act like a child who appreciates everything its father does and says. The son of a plowman thinks his father and mother are the most capable people nature can produce. If the Sister Servant does or says something that doesn't please us, don't think on that account that she's not doing a good job. It's not your place to criticize what she does; you have to believe that what she does is good; for you see, Sisters, there's a grace for that duty, and there's a special angel concerned with it. God gives sufficient graces to those He calls to it. Don't think that responsible positions are always given to the most capable or virtuous. You must believe that a Sister Servant has been given to you by God, because entire nights are spent before God to see who will be placed in those duties. And if sometimes we change one Sister, sometimes another, dear Sisters, it's to give practice to some in leadership and to others in obedience. So consider that it's God who does things this way, for all order comes from Him, and whoever resists order resists God.

A >But it seems to me that there's a better way to do it.= That's what you think! And who are you? Is it for you to find fault with what your Superiors do, you who don't have the grace of God for that? Rest assured that God will bless you, dear Sisters, if you use the means I=ve just given you.

AAnother evil that may arise among you is attachment to confessors; that's why change is necessary, for otherwise a certain spiritual friendship may spring up, which comes from the penitent's esteem for the confessor and his esteem for the penitent, and both are pleased with this little reciprocal affection. It's very difficult for a confessor, who sees his penitent making progress and benefiting from his advice, not to receive some satisfaction from it. But what happens? The confessor may say, >I'm really consoled at seeing the progress you=re making in virtue,= and the Sister will reply, >Father, I haven't found any confessor in whom I have such confidence. Your words put me so much at ease that I have no trouble following your advice.=

And those honeyed words shoot an arrow into the heart, causing a scandalous breach in it. As soon as they are spoken, all is lost. In the end a great commotion is created by such familiarities. Alas! dear Sisters, this happens only too often, even in religious Orders.

ASo, tell your sins to the confessors and waste no time in conversation with them after confession. Don't say to them, >I'll see you and will tell you more about this in private, Monsieur.=

AIf he goes to see you and asks you what you=re doing, cut the conversation short and show that you=re not pleased with that. If you find that it will be difficult for you to go to another confessor and that you continue to be troubled by this affection, you should be alarmed, Sisters, and let Mademoiselle, M. Portail, or myself know about it, stating quite simply how you feel: >Please change my confessor, because I think I'm too attached to him.= If you=re living far away, you must write; even if you=re in Toulouse, where people are asking for you, you should write. The reason why you=re changed is so you won't become attached to anything. When this isn't done, what happens? One Sister wants to go to one confessor and the other to another. They lose God's peace; they fall into the worst and most dangerous state of disunion that can occur. Do you know which fractures are the most difficult to heal, dear Sisters? Fractures at the joint. Now, the joint of the Daughters of Charity is the person who is supposed to unite them to one another and all of them to God, namely, their confessor. If they break this bond and want to change, if, following their own whims, one wants to go to this confessor and another to that one, there will be constant division, a complete break. When a Sister, to gratify herself, wants to have a man who charms her by his qualities and pleases her, what a source of great disorder she is, Sisters! That's why I ask that, whenever Mademoiselle sees this, she should change the Sister and, like Our Lord today, feast of the Circumcision, to cut off and to remove.

AA fifth means to bind and unite you closely together is, dear Sisters, when you=re in a parish or out in the country, not to take advice from anyone except those given you for that purpose. Mentioning your aversion for your Sisters or your Sister Servant, or telling your temptations to anyone but those appointed for that is never permitted. Oh no! you may never do that. No, dear Sisters, tell your troubles only to those to whom you should tell them.

A >Wouldn't it be permissible to mention them to some kind Lady?= Be very much on your guard against that, Sisters, for, not having have the spirit of your Company, how can she give you the proper advice? What she'll tell you will be inappropriate. Never tell your troubles to the Ladies; if you do, even should you be as strong as Samson, one of two evils will occur: either you'll lose your vocation or you'll give scandal. This Lady will tell another--and don't be surprised at that, for if you yourselves were unable to keep your secret, how can you expect someone else to do so? That's the myrrh you can offer to God: mortify yourselves by telling your troubles only to those to whom you should tell them.

A >But if you send me to Toulouse, to Poland, or to other distant places, how can we write? If we do, we'll have to wait a long time for the reply. What shall I do then?= Sisters, there will always be someone to advise you; we appoint someone for that purpose everywhere, but never consult anyone other than him.

AWe still have to talk about how to behave in order to edify the neighbor, and about many other things; please God, we'll discuss them at another time. May Our Lord grant us the grace to really put into practice all that we=ve just said!@

Mademoiselle knelt down and said, AFather, I very humbly entreat you, for the love of God, in the name of all our Sisters, to ask the Divine Goodness to pardon all our faults and the bad use

we=ve made of the admonitions Your Charity has given us, and me especially, who should give good example to our Sisters by putting them into practice myself, for which I most humbly ask their pardon.@

AVery well, Mademoiselle! Unworthy though I am, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to pardon our Sisters for the bad use they=ve made of the instructions they=ve received and for all their infidelities in the practice of these instructions. And because I=ve been very negligent about giving you the necessary reminders, or haven't given them as I should have or in the spirit in which I ought, and because Mademoiselle perhaps feels guilty, we ask you, dear Sisters, to forgive both of us for the faults we=ve committed in your regard. I ask Our Lord in His mercy to forgive all of us in general and, at the same time I pronounce the words of blessing over you, to grant you the grace to enter fully into the practice of what has been said. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

58. - SECRET PRIDE

March 15, 1654

ADear Sisters, the subject of this conference is secret pride, not pride generally speaking, but secret pride. It's divided into three points. The first concerns the reasons we have for being on the alert against secret pride; second, the signs by which we can know if we have this secret pride in us, and third, the means of keeping it from entering our hearts, or of driving it out if it's already there. Tell us, Sister, the reasons we have for knowing whether we have this secret pride in us.@

AOne reason that obliges us to do this, Father, is that this pride is very displeasing to God; humility, on the contrary, is very pleasing to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave us an example of it himself throughout His life, and willed that His Mother should be the most humble of all creatures. It seemed to me that we have secret pride when we look down on others, have a better opinion of ourselves than of them, and are pleased that others have a good opinion of us.@

ASister, even were there no other reason than the one you just mentioned, namely, that Our Lord came to combat this vice and to overthrow it by actions contrary to it, that's a powerful motive to make us avoid it.

AWell now, Sister, did you think that Daughters of Charity can have secret pride?@

AYes, Father, it seems to me that they can have a good opinion of themselves, murmur against the actions of others, ignore them, criticize what their neighbor is doing, and many other things.@

AYou=re quite right, Sister. And yet vainglory shouldn't have any place among you because pride usually comes from the noble birth and social status of individuals, and, for the most part, you are poor country girls, children of plowmen like myself. All of us are of very little account. As for your attire, your headdress and the rest, there's no room for being vain about them. With regard to intelligence, alas! most of you are from the country and can't have very lofty minds. As for food, poor people eat almost the same things you do: a little beef or something similar. There's no room there for self-esteem or presumption. And for your conversations, you mix only with persons who are poor and are their servants; there's certainly nothing in that to make you proud.

ASo, it's not that kind of pride that will come among you. But there are two kinds of pride: one stems from occupations; it's the pride of persons who strut about because of their duties and are vain about them. A Sister who would set off in the morning to visit the poor, doing so only to please a Lady and to be thought well of by her, would commit an act of pride. The other sort of

pride resides just as well in a grey dress as under more elegant ones, and that's the pride we=re talking about, for it can exist in you. We know it by its effects.

AIt's the cause of all the sins we commit, just as humility is the origin of all the good we do. There's no evil that doesn't begin with hidden pride. If a Sister says something in praise of herself, if she's disobedient, if she's on bad terms with her Sister, if she wants to be Sister Servant, all that is hidden pride. So, the first reason why we must avoid this vice is that it's the cause of all evils.

AThe second is that God grants nothing to those affected by it; for, no matter what prayers they say or what good they do, God doesn't answer their prayers. It is written that >God resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble.= [1] Ponder those words: >God resists the proud,= and say, >*Quoi*! I have this pride, and God says that He won't grant anything to such persons; I want to try to get away from that.=

AThe third reason is that God permits souls tainted by it to fall into serious sins: impurity and loss of vocation--yes, Sisters, loss of vocation. Hasn't God said, >You esteem yourselves highly and raise yourselves up; you shall fall.= [2] If a Sister is well thought of in a parish, if she imagines she's more adept at pleasing a confessor or a Lady, it's to be feared that she may ultimately fall and lose her vocation.

AThe fourth evil is that pride spoils all the good we do and causes such disorder in our actions that they=re displeasing to God. That's what usually happens to vain, proud souls. The good works they do are completely spoiled. Whether it be by an individual Sister or the whole Company, everything that's done will be spoiled.

AThe fifth reason is that secret pride is a sign of damnation, just as humility is a sign of predestination. Now, isn't there reason to fear when our salvation is in danger? You can see how very important it is to ask God to give us the grace of ridding us of this poison. O Savior, deliver us, and deliver me, I who am perhaps more guilty of this vice than anyone else.

A >You=ve told us many things,= you'll say to me, >but how will I be able to know if I have this secret pride, Monsieur? Perhaps I'll become humble when I know it.=

AThe first sign, dear Sisters, is if we think too highly of ourselves and of what we do, if we want others to have a good opinion of us, and want our confessors and the Ladies of Charity to esteem us. There are two things, then: having a good opinion of ourselves, and wanting our Superiors, companions, and others to esteem us and say, >There's a fine Sister who's doing good work.= But how do we know if we have a good opinion of ourselves, and if we=re pleased when others think highly of us? We know it when we=re pleased that people praise us, or are satisfied when someone is pleased with us.

AThe third sign is to do something apart from obedience, for disobedience is a sign of arrogance. Mademoiselle or the confessor will prescribe something, and a Sister will pay no attention to it. That's a sign of secret pride.

AThe fourth sign is when we say something in praise of ourselves. We don't say it openly, but we boast openly, >I=ve done this or that.= Just as fever manifests itself by a high temperature, so pride manifests itself by the tongue. We=re so pleased to relate what we=ve done! We introduce it in a roundabout way so it doesn't seem like we=re looking for praise.

AThe fifth sign, dear Sisters, is when actions are deliberately performed to gain the good graces of a Superior or another Sister. Visiting the sick in order to please a Lady of Charity or anyone else, or doing our utmost to acquire esteem, all that is a sign of secret pride. We must

really be on our guard against that.

AThe sixth sign is to quarrel with our Sisters and to be unwilling to yield, and the seventh sign is stubbornness. One Sister wants something to be done one way; the other wants it done differently. Each will hold to her own opinion. The advice of her Sister Servant, her confessor, the Director, or her Superioress will be incapable of making her give in because she's confirmed in her own decision. It's firmly entrenched in her brain; it's impossible to make her budge an inch. That's a sign of secret pride and a diabolical characteristic because only demons remain fixed in their obstinacy. So, it's a devilish spirit, so firmly established in evil that the demon remains in it forever. Such a person sometimes feels remorse, but she doesn't have the strength to follow the impulse; she=d like to do it, but cannot.

AThe eighth sign is singularity, even in devotional matters, such as wanting to go to Communion more frequently than others, to have a rosary, to wear a nicer collar, to draw attention to herself by her headdress or her attire. All that, Sisters, is a sign of pride. Be very careful of that; avoid any singularity.

AAnother sign is to be ambitious for more honorable offices or duties, leading one to want to become a Sister Servant. If a Sister who has this desire is sent to a parish, she can't submit to her Sister; she thinks she's more capable, would be a better leader, has greater experience, is more prayerful, and should, therefore, be the Sister Servant. If she has thoughts like this and doesn't reject them immediately, but entertains them, that's a diabolical spirit; yes, to presume that we do better than others is a diabolical spirit.

ASo, Sisters, those are the signs by which we can know if we have this secret pride; for you see, this vice is all the more to be feared because it's secret and unknown.

ABut how can we rid ourselves of it? It's all the more difficult because we=re unaware of it and are blind about ourselves; and when we=re told that we have it, we don't want to believe it. Note carefully that we can know it only by its effects. What makes it more dangerous is that it never appears except under the semblance of good. For instance, if a Sister asks to receive Holy Communion more often than her Sister, her confessor, who is inexperienced, will think she's led to this by a great love of God and great tenderness toward Our Lord. He'll say to her, >Go to Holy Communion, Sister.= Who won't believe that it's not for a greater good? And yet it's pride.

AThere's no pride without disobedience. For example, you fail to make your prayer. Why? You'll say, >I was detained; I was writing a letter to a relative, or I went to see a Lady or a poor person, or I didn't want to hurt my Sister, who also failed to make her prayer, so as not to seem better than she.= Well now! who wouldn't think that all these things are apparently good? What makes this sin incurable then--or almost incurable--is that it's always committed under the guise of something good.

A >But, Monsieur,= you'll ask me, >I admit that I'm guilty; I'm pleased when I'm praised; I'm disobedient; and to appear steadfast, I=ve said things in praise of myself to a Sister who seemed more lax. What's to be done about that?=

ALet me give you two or three pieces of advice, dear Sisters. The first is to try to discover if you have this pride. If you see that you do, declare before God that you want to strive with all your heart to acquire holy humility, and ask Him to grant us this grace.

AThe second is to examine your actions every day and often reflect: >Haven't I been pleased when people praised me? If I have, I'll be more careful on another occasion; I'll recall the humiliation of Our Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate; I'll cast myself at the foot of Your Holy Cross.= Ask yourselves whether you=ve been disobedient or stubborn, even with the confessor,

whom you sometimes question and resist, or with Superiors, or the Superioress. >Haven't I had some proud thoughts or the desire to be the Sister Servant?= If you recognize such a desire, break it off and say, >My Lord, I renounce that with all my heart, and I prefer to be a simple Sister from the Charity all my life rather than to be a Sister Servant.=

AAsk yourselves also whether you=re on bad terms with any of your Sisters, whether you=re unwilling to give in to others, whether you dispute everything that's said. The Sister who wants to become humble must yield in everything except what conscience does not allow.

AIf a Sister intended to break a Rule, if, for example, she were to say to her Sister Servant, >Four o=clock is very early to get up; we should rise later=; or if, when it's time to go to Mass, she objected: >We have too much to do today, Sister=; in those instances the Sister Servant must remain firm and not give in. But, in matters of indifference, the Sister who wants to belong to God will yield in everything. So, it's advisable to examine your conscience every day and, if you find that you=ve failed, to ask pardon of God and the grace to correct yourselves.

AThe third means, dear Sisters, is to ask your confessor, Director, or Superioress, >Do I have any hidden pride?= If the answer is yes, then believe it, even if you yourselves don't recognize it, because we are blind. A physician who is ill doesn't diagnose himself, he calls in another doctor. Even when he's well, he does the same. In like manner, a person suffering from secret pride doesn't know herself. God allows the devil to blindfold her so she doesn't see this vice, doesn't speak about it, doesn't accuse herself of it. How then will she get rid of it if no one tells her about it? Ask your confessor, >Monsieur, do you think I have some secret pride? I beg you to let me know.= And you'll have to believe him.

AIf you do have hidden pride, what should you do? Ask God for the weapons to fight it because it's our greatest enemy; it's the cause of all evil and the ruin of all that's good; it makes us enemies of God, who resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble. That's why you should say every day in your prayers, >O Savior, deliver me from secret pride, from too much self-esteem, from the desire that others think well of me.= In addition, have great devotion to Our Lord; to the Blessed Virgin, who tells us that God looked upon her because she was humble; to the saints; and to your Guardian Angel--all of whom have given us examples of humility.

AIn the third place, perform some acts of humility every day. I don't mean external acts, although they=re good, such as kissing the feet of others, but acts of the heart. Let's say to ourselves interiorly that we=re nothing, that we=re sinners; let's not desire to be known or esteemed, like Our Lord who led a hidden life; when people saw Him, they said of Him, >Isn't this the carpenter's son?=[3] To imitate that humility of Jesus we must love the hidden life as He did, consider ourselves among the least in the Company, acknowledge that we=re wretched, without intelligence or power, believe that, if there's any evil, we=re the cause of it, and attribute what is good to others. If you follow this advice, dear Sisters, to what degree of grace will you not attain? God himself says, >On whom do you think I turn my eyes if not on the one who hides herself? She is my spouse, my beloved, in whom I take my delight.=

AWhat pleasures, what interior delights are received by a soul who is hidden in this way from others and happy to be known by God alone! Only those who experience it can say.

ASo there, dear Sisters, is the enemy unmasked; I=ve shown him to you; be very vigilant and make good resolutions beginning right now. If you=re faithful to them, the Company will be the Company of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and you will acquire the title of His spouses.@

Most Honored Father then knelt down and offered the following prayer to God, after telling

us to recite it with him: ALord, what I have just heard makes me see how important it is to recognize the great evils this pride brings to a soul. But how can I know it unless You yourself give me the grace to do so? And if You do not give me inspiration and impulses, how can I rid myself of it? You ask each of us for our goodwill to cooperate with Your graces. Lord, behold us prostrate at Your feet; we offer our wills to You and declare that we no longer want people to esteem us. You gave the Blessed Virgin an abundance of profound humility; through her we ask You to give us a share in it. You were so humble that You willed to be regarded as a sinner and to be nailed to a cross. You willed not only to be humble during Your life but also after death so that Your children might follow You. It is therefore from You, my Savior, that we ask the grace to strive for the acquisition of this virtue, as you desire of us.

AHoly Virgin, you who share so fully in this holy humility, help us; obtain this virtue for us from your dear Son for the whole Company and for all our dear Sisters who are far from here. This is the prayer I offer you with all my heart. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

59. - THE PRESERVATION OF THE COMPANY

May 25, 1654

ADear Sisters, the subject of this conference is the preservation of the Company. It's divided into three points. The first concerns the reasons why Sisters should give themselves to God to live in such a manner that their Company may last for many years or, to put it better, that it may subsist happily, continue, and be preserved forever; in the second point we'll deal with what can ruin it and, in the third, the means for preventing it from being ruined.

ASister, what reasons do Daughters of Charity have to give themselves to God to live in such a way that the Lord's work may not perish in your hands?@

AFather, I haven't thought about it yet, but it seems to me that it's very necessary to give ourselves to God for that purpose so that He may do, in and through us, His most holy Will, without which we can do nothing.@

AAnd you, Sister, what reason do you have for that?@

AThe first one is that we must abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and trust completely in it. A second reason is that God is the author of this Company, which He has formed for himself. It seems to me, Father, that there's no need for any other reason to prompt us to desire the preservation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.@

AGod bless you, Sister! Sister states that one reason is to put our trust in the Providence of God, and that's very true. She proposes as a second reason that the Company has been instituted by God. As a matter of fact, it's a rule laid down by Saint Augustine that what human persons haven't done comes from God. Now, dear Sisters, the fact is that no one on earth can say, >I did that.= Mademoiselle can't say it, neither can M. Portail, nor anyone else. No, Sisters, no one can say, >I'm the one who did this work.=

A >How can that be, Monsieur,= you'll object to me. >If what you say is true, then who is the workman? Did it do itself?= No, it didn=t, but it's not the work of human persons, because no one had ever thought of the Company of Charity. From this you can conclude with Saint Augustine that what has not been done by human persons has God for its author.

AO Savior, You then are the one who created this great work, from which You draw such great benefits; may You be forever blessed for it! How happy you are, Sisters, to be called to such a holy ministry! That's a strong motive for living so perfectly that this Company will not decline. Another reason is the great blessings God has imparted to the Company, for we have to acknowledge that He has blessed it in the sight of everyone. Isn't it a great blessing that He

brought to it so many good souls, now in heaven, who lived like angels and whom we can call saints, seeing the life they led? *Mon Dieu*! dear Sisters, what a blessing is the example they=ve left us!

ARecently I related at a meeting of very devout and virtuous Ladies what we were saying a few days before about Sister Andrée[1] and the words she uttered before she died. It was at a conference like this one. I told them Sister Andrée's reply to a question I put to her: >I have no anxiety, no remorse,= she said, >except for having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor.= And when I asked her, >*Eh quoi*! Sister, is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?= she replied, >No, Monsieur, nothing at all, other than that I had too much satisfaction when I used to go through those villages to see those good people; I used to fly, I was so overjoyed to serve them.= When I told them this, one of those good Ladies, clapping her hands before all of them, couldn't refrain from exclaiming that she had never heard anyone say something like that. She must have had deep feelings of admiration not to have been able to contain herself and to manifest these external signs. Has anything like it ever been seen? Isn't great purity needed to be in such a disposition? Must she not have led a saintly life to have had no remorse of conscience at a moment when the saints themselves have been assailed by it? Could such a perfect state be found in a religious Order? Not that I'm trying to compare the poor Daughters of Charity with nuns, who are so far above them; No! God forbid! but I will say that I=ve never seen a more perfect state. From that we have to conclude that the Company, in which there have been, and still are, so many excellent souls--for I do believe there are some who are very perfect--is a work of God. I know some Sisters who would rather die than fail in fidelity to God; one of these is the Sister whom the Queen of Poland[2] wanted to keep with her. I told you this before, but I can't refrain from saying it again; perhaps all of you weren't here. However that may be, that Sister didn't appreciate the Queen's offer and her heart was stricken by it. >Sister,= Her Majesty said to her, >I love you and that's why I want to keep you with me; are you really unwilling to serve me?= Since the Sister remained silent, the Queen added, >*Eh quoi*! Sister, you=re not giving me a single word in reply! I'm inviting you to remain with me and you have nothing to say.= >Alas! Madame, I belong to the poor; I gave myself to God for that purpose; you'll find plenty of worthy people to serve Your Majesty; allow me to do the work to which God has called me.=

AO Savior of our souls, what a grace was needed to prompt that Sister to give such a reply, and what a blessing You have bestowed on a Company in which there are souls so attached to Your service! Isn't that beautiful, Sisters? Is that the work of a human person? Oh no! not at all, by no means. Consequently, we have to say that God has given great graces to the Sisters in this house whom He has called. She's not the only one; there are many others. *Quoi*! to prefer the poor to Queens, the poor dress of a Daughter of Charity to taffeta--for one goes with the other--the conversation of poor Daughters of Charity to that of Ladies, a poor life to the riches of the Court. That certainly isn't the work of creatures but of God. He himself is the one who does these works; He uses you as instruments to show how much He wants to make use of you. Add to that the service you render to poor persons wherever our Sisters are present, so many souls who have gone to God and whom you have helped by your instructions and assistance both corporally and spiritually, and so many sick poor whom you are now helping and serving; for, in the parishes of Paris alone, to say nothing of those in the country and in hospitals, there are as many of them as at the Hôtel-Dieu. Who would believe that of poor creatures such as you, if he wasn't aware of the blessing Our Lord imparts to the whole Company? Our Sister was right in saying that God is the author of it.

ANo other motive is needed to encourage you to improve and to strengthen your vocation. This is a work that God has placed in your hands. He will ask you for an account of it. Isn't that just, Sisters? It's a treasure you have in your care and whose loss you must prevent. Say to yourselves, >God has called me to His service for this work; He has placed it as a deposit in my hands; I want to preserve it carefully. If I were responsible for a foundling, I wouldn't let it perish in my hands. If I'm so careful about something that concerns only the life of the body, what must I not do for the preservation of the Company, which is concerned with both the life of the body and the life of the soul!= If we had a thousand lives, dear Sisters, we should devote all of them to striving for the development of this work. What a misfortune if the Company were to decline through our fault! Our Lord, turning toward the city of Jerusalem, wept and sorrowfully lamented its destruction.[3] Who could witness the destruction of this Company, dear Sisters, without bursting into tears? We would die of regret if that were to happen!

AThat's the subject of the second point, namely, what can destroy the Company of Charity, that is, what can oblige God to take His grace from us because of the bad use we=ve made of it and to look upon us as persons who have been excommunicated and are unworthy to occupy this place.

ASister, in your opinion, what else could bring about the ruin of the Company of Charity?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that this would happen if we were to listen to temptations against our vocation.@

ASister is right. Temptation will never be lacking to souls who are trying to serve God; it wasn't lacking even to the Apostles and to Our Lord; all those who try to live a holy life will suffer persecution, that is, will be tempted and afflicted. Now, if a Daughter of Charity doesn't resist temptation, if, for example, she wants to have something that would allow her more freedom or something similar, and takes pleasure in this, she'll say to the others, >If only we had this or that! Our life is too hard!= If all of them listen to this temptation, what will they do? They'll murmur, complain about Superiors, and say they don't have what they want. That's the harm that will be done to those who don't resist from the very beginning.

ABe aware, Sisters, that it's nothing to be attacked by one, two, or even several temptations; no, that's nothing if, from the beginning, we reject them, after recognizing that the devil is putting these wicked thoughts into our minds. You should say, >Lord, I know there will never be a Daughter of Charity who isn't tempted.= No, dear Sisters, there are none and there never will be any. All good people must resign themselves to being tempted. No tree is free from worms; likewise, there's no Daughter of Charity who doesn't have temptations against her vocation, but you must resist them courageously and never listen to them, no matter how good they may appear; for whatever good they may offer you, Sisters, they=re basilisks that put up lovely pretenses in order to seduce you.

ATell us, Sister, what could bring about the ruin of the Company?@

AFather, I think it would be a disregard for the graces God has given us; all those who have left us went away because they didn't know the value of their call to the Company and didn't esteem their vocation sufficiently.@

AWhat you say is so true, Sister; God bless you! *Mon Dieu*! Sisters, the cause of all our misfortunes, of the sins we commit, of our disregard for the Rules, in a word, of all the evil we do is that we don't appreciate the gifts of God. Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, >*O mulier*, O woman, if you knew the gift of God,[4] if you knew the power of the water I give!= So too, Sisters, if we only knew the worth of this grace! O Sister! if you only recognized your good

fortune! If you could only form some idea of the greatness of your ministry! How well that Sister knew it who declined the honor of serving the Queen of Poland! Oh yes! she understood clearly what a happiness it is to serve the members of Our Lord; and all our other Sisters have shown on similar occasions how highly they esteemed their vocation.

AWho wouldn't esteem this vocation! *Quoi*! to do what God did when He was on earth! You=d have to be very insensitive! Let's ask this grace of God so that, knowing our happiness, we may not spurn it. I think that all of you love your vocation, but there may be some who don't appreciate this grace properly and aren't sufficiently steadfast in the endeavor God has given them the grace to undertake. Let each of you ask herself, >Am I growing weary of my Rules and the instructions of my Superiors? Shall I be so cowardly as to throw away my vocation for the few vain hopes this temptation presents to me?= And if we see that we=re determined to be faithful to God, disdaining all the honors and pleasures that may present themselves, we must thank God for this and give Him all the glory for it. If, on the other hand, we are fainthearted in these dispositions, we must ask pardon of His Divine Goodness and say, >My Savior, forgive me the sins that have brought me to such a sad state; forgive me, Lord, the infidelities that are the cause of my misfortune.=

ASisters, if I were to ask you, >Do you want to leave the Company? You'll have a little property and freedom; you won't be obliged to such submission; you'll be better fed,= you=d say to me, >Shame on you, Monsieur! What are you saying to me? *Quoi*! are you suggesting that I abandon my God, who has given me so many graces, for a fleeting pleasure! For we can call fleeting that which passes away with time. Oh! I'll do no such thing.= I think, Sisters, that many of you would answer me this way. Give the same reply to temptations.

ASister, how could the Company of the Daughters of Charity be destroyed?@

AFather, I think that what can ruin it and cause the Sisters to leave is the failure to mention our temptations to Superiors; and the means of preventing this is to have great freedom in telling them our troubles. In my own case, whenever God has given me this grace, I=ve been extremely happy about it.@

AGod bless you, Sister! You=re quite right. That's the source of the ruin of the Company, namely, keeping our temptations in our hearts, and being unwilling to tell our Superiors about them but telling them to one another. A Sister whose mind is ill at ease will unburden herself to another with the same malady and, instead of helping, consoling, and comforting one another, they'll harm one another. From these two the contagion will spread quickly to the others. And that's how the ruin of the Company will come about. That's why, Sisters, rest assured that you can't persevere if you don't tell your troubles to those who can console you.

ASister, please tell us what is capable of leading Daughters of Charity astray and, consequently, of ruining the Company.@

AFather, I think it's the company of laypersons because we learn their manner of acting, and then we inadvertently behave like them.@

ASister, what you say is so true and important! It's certain, Sisters, that anyone who mingles with worldly-minded people becomes worldly; just as, on the contrary, those who find themselves in good company benefit from it. When you see a Daughter of Charity enjoying herself in society, that's not a good sign. When a parish Sister is pleased that the Ladies think highly of her and say, >She's a very good Sister; she takes excellent care of the poor,= she takes a liking to those persons, who praise and applaud her. Be careful, Sisters, that people's attachment to you may not be caused by your attachment to them.

A >If I were of the world,= said the Savior of the world, >it would love me, but because I am not of the world it hates me because it finds nothing of its own in me.=[5] Consequently, dear Sisters, when you see that you=re loved by people in the world, conclude from it that you are of the world, since it loves only its own; for, as soon as you feel pleased at receiving the praises people give you, say, >I don't have the spirit Our Lord wants me to have.=

AWhat do you think the spirit of the world is? It's to love esteem, honor, and praise; it's to disdain Sisters who are exact and obedient. As soon as a Sister loves those who have the spirit of the world and takes pleasure in their company, you can say, >This Sister is in grave danger of losing her vocation.= Not that you should disdain the Ladies. Oh no! they should be respected and honored because of the means they give you of serving the poor, as well as for the authority they have over you, for they take the place of a mother toward you in all that concerns the poor; but you shouldn't take pleasure in their company or remain a long time with them, if necessity doesn't oblige you to do so; above all, never let yourselves go so far as to tell them your troubles, your aversions, or your complaints against your Sisters. You see from this how dangerous the company of laypersons is for you; therefore, you must avoid it as much as possible; for they can be the cause of your losing your fervor in your vocation. Sister was right in saying that this would be a great danger for the Company.

AAnd you, Sister, what could ruin the Company?@

AThe Company, Father, would be ruined if the Sisters weren't faithful to keeping their Rules.@

AThat's well said, Sister; especially since a lack of fidelity in keeping your Rules shows a contempt for holy things, for your Rules are holy and tend to what is holy; they help you either to serve poor persons well or to improve yourselves. So, when you neglect or despise them, people can say good-bye to the Company, and although it may not be completely destroyed, all that will be visible will be the bark of the tree, and nothing more; it will be like dead trees that have nothing underneath the green bark. Sisters, what a great evil is the failure to keep the Rules! To neglect them, not to take them into account, and to disregard the means God uses to save us merit a severe punishment. *Quoi*! To turn up your nose at the means of salvation and not to think highly of the graces God gives us! Has He given us any greater grace than to make known His holy Will to us by our Rules?

AGod gave His law to the people of Israel and said, >Keep this law faithfully and don't neglect a single point of it, for as soon as you infringe upon it, you can expect all sorts of evils and miseries.= So, Sisters, rest assured that you'll be blessed by God as long as you=re faithful to the practice of your Rules, but as soon as you break them, you'll be filled with spiritual wretchedness, temptations, repugnance, and loathing.

A >But, Monsieur,= you'll say to me, >someone comes to look for me at the time to go to prayer; what should I do then in order to be faithful to my Rules?= Sisters, you have no obligation more important than the service of the sick, and you certainly don't break your Rules by going to nurse the patients. But as soon as you have finished what called you to them, return to your prayer; for you see, Sisters, you must be zealous about observing all your Rules, even the smallest; and when the service of the sick obliges you to alter your schedule, you must try to make up that time. Mademoiselle, I think it would be well to have the Rules read aloud so that the Sisters may see and learn what they are.@

AFather, we do that every month for those who are here but, if it pleases Your Charity, I think it would be essential to bring the Sisters in the parishes here every month, and for fear that this

might inconvenience the Ladies or give them reason for saying that the Sisters come here too often--for Your Charity has led us to hope for a conference every month--it would be well, if you see fit, for some of them to come one day and the others on another day.@

AThat sounds like a good idea to me, Mademoiselle. M. Portail, are you of the same opinion?@

AYes, Monsieur, I think that's very necessary.@

AYes, Sisters, that will be very helpful. The Capuchins read their Rules every week, not to learn them, for they know them well, but to refresh their memory and spur them on to practice them. So then, you'll come here to hear the Rules read, with the desire to observe them. But before settling that, and how and when it shall be done, we'll reflect on it before God; for that's how our Rules were drawn up, after asking for His inspiration.

APlease tell us your thoughts, Mademoiselle.@

AMonsieur, the first reason we have for giving ourselves to God to obtain from His Goodness that the Company may last for long years to come--forever, if possible--is the conviction we must have that God himself willed this establishment and willed it in the form in which it exists. Now, God doesn't will that His creatures destroy what He has made. Another reason is that those who would contravene God's plan by the destruction of the Company would be the cause of the loss of many souls and would prevent many poor persons from being assisted, and this infidelity would put their eternal salvation in danger. What might also contribute to the ruin of the Company is, first, to want to change the customs because that would be, in a certain sense, to prefer our own judgment to the guidance of God, who knows well enough its future needs.@

AMademoiselle, please stop there; that idea needs to be explained. It's very important--if there's anything important--not to change anything. What was said before is good, but this is even better; it's the touchstone. Some misguided person might say, >It's all very well not to change anything, but how is that to be done?= One Sister will think, >It would be much more modest if we had our faces veiled. *Quoi*! to be seen unveiled!= Another will judge it well to admit young women of high rank; that would make the Company attractive. And once these upper-class young women were in the Company, the plain, simple sort of life that's led in it would have to be changed; it would have to be a little more accommodating. They=d find the Company rustic; they=d have to be seen a little more in public to please Mlle X who doesn't like such simplicity. Ah, cursed state! Wretched self-satisfaction! Perdition! As soon as you get to that point, Sisters, as soon as you begin to dress a little more fashionably, someone will say, >We must be better housed; when people come here, it's mortifying to have them see such cheap things.=

AOthers will say, >*Quoi*! Monsieur, to oblige us not to have anything of our own is very hard.= When you reach that stage it's a diabolical temptation, it's perdition. You see, Sisters, you must avoid as representatives of Satan all those who want you to make changes because by that means they are aspiring to nothing else than the ruin of the Company. Ah, Sisters! be afraid when you hear a Sister say, >This should be done like that; it would be better and more convenient.= A Sister who loves her vocation and hears such language must flee; she can believe that anyone who wants to change what God has done is a very wicked person, who deserves to burn in hell.

AWhen it's Superiors who think it advisable to make a change, you must believe that it's God; God, who used them to establish the Order, uses them again when changes are to be made. That's why you must never criticize. But if a private individual tries to interfere and to change

something, you mustn't tolerate it! Judas's malady began with that: he wanted to change Our Lord's maxims for the use of the money entrusted to him. There's no need to say anything more to persuade you to take the resolution never to change anything. If someone suggests a change to you, don't listen to him. Say, >That man hasn't been called by God to direct the Company; therefore, I'm not obliged to follow his advice.=

AI recall, in this connection, the story of Rechab.[6] He was a good man. It's said of him that, thinking that the use of wine was harmful to a person's life, he never drank any, and neither did his children. When someone said something to them about this, they would say, >My father didn't drink it; and we don't want to drink it either.= His children's children observed this custom from father to son for three hundred years. See how Rechab's good example was followed for so long by his children's children. They used to say, >Our forefathers didn't drink wine and they continued to live; why shouldn't we do as they did?= See from this example how you should act, Sisters.

AWhen someone talks to you about making changes, you should reply, >What are you saying, Sister? We=ve been brought up like that; we=ve always kept to this way of life. *O Sauveur*, I don't want to change anything.= If there are two persons who think this way, there will be two more in favor of a change. What will happen? The first two will win over two others, whom they'll persuade to stand fast; the other two will agree with one another, and there you have division. When people see that, everything will fall into disorder; all will be lost and the ruin of the Company will be at hand.

ADear Sisters, take the resolution, beginning right now, not to change anything, neither in Mademoiselle's lifetime nor after her death, nor after mine, but to preserve inviolably the excellent customs that have prevailed, and still do, in this house, and hold firmly to that. Why desire any other way of life than the one with which God inspired your Superiors, and which is in conformity with that of Jesus Christ? If the Daughters of Charity observe their little Regulations faithfully, they'll be imitating the Sisters His Goodness chose at the beginning of this Company. Such excellent souls, and how well they knew how to use those practices and good customs!

AThis is one of the most excellent states of life I=ve ever seen, dear Sisters; don't look for one that's more perfect. If you want to be great saints, you'll find the means in your spiritual exercises. How many perfect souls we=ve had in the Company! They=re now in heaven, and by the mercy of God there are still some on earth.

AWell, now, it's getting late. I think it would be advisable to postpone this to some other time. What do you think, Mademoiselle? Would it be better if we put it off until some other time?@

AFather, I think we really should do that, if Your Charity thinks it advisable.@

AThen let's postpone it because, you see, this is a matter of great importance; when there's question of preserving a Company, neither time nor trouble should be spared. Do you know, Sisters, how long Noah took to build the ark and to make it as perfect as it should be? One hundred years. O Savior of our souls! O my dear Sisters! If so much time was required to build the ark, in which only eight persons were saved from the deluge, how much do you think is needed to strengthen and preserve this Company, which such a large number of souls will enter and will save themselves from the deluge of the world!

AWhen a city is besieged, the Governor and those responsible for defending it keep guard, see where danger may be lurking, and reinforce the weak places. If some gate isn't secure--and even

if it is--they still post a sentry. See what vigilance is used for what concerns the body, dear Sisters, once people know where the dangers are. God inspired you to make such an important remark, Mademoiselle; may He be blessed for it!

ALet's now see where the enemy could make a breach; let's ask ourselves where he might be able to get in, let's build a wall there and mount our cannon; in a word, let's look for the means of thwarting him; for, once this enemy of our souls succeeds in penetrating the Company, what would he not do to ruin and overturn it?@

Most Honored Father then said three times, pausing each time and raising his eyes heavenward, AAh, Sisters! Ah, Sisters! Ah, Sisters!@ then he added, AWell now, *mon Sauveur*, that's enough. May Our Lord Jesus Christ give us a good understanding of the importance of what has been said in order to put it into practice so that, by our sins and infidelities, we may not cause the ruin of this beautiful Company, which He himself has formed as He wished it. We ask this grace of You, Lord, through the merits of Your Holy Mother and by the service You want to obtain from this Company. My Savior, You who are the light of the world, grant us the grace we need to recognize the wiles by which the enemy tries to seduce the souls of those who give themselves to You, in order to keep him from entering and overturning the work of Your hands. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@

60. - ENVY

June 24, 1654

AThe subject of this conference, dear Sisters, is envy or jealousy. It is divided into three points: first, the great evils that will befall the Company in general and each Sister in particular if envy and jealousy prevail in it; second, the various ways of sinning by envy or jealousy, and third, some means to be taken so as not to fall into them.

ASister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this subject?@

AI thought, Father, that envy was dangerous and the source of great evils, since it caused the death of Our Lord, but if, instead of this bad envy, we had a great desire for what is good and perfect, then it would be a good kind of envy.@

AIn that case, Sister, you are including two kinds of envy: a good one and a bad one. The one that tends toward evil is for worldly persons but not for the servants of God. The other is recommended by Saint Paul who says, >Be jealous, but of virtue and not to prevent it from producing the effects it is wont to do, but rather to acquire it.=

AOur Sister has remarked another form of it. It's the envy that causes a Sister to be sad and upset at the well-being of her Sisters because another is better fed, better maintained, better clothed than she, and is held in higher esteem and appreciation by Superiors. Those are the effects of this accursed envy, which causes great disorder in the souls affected by it. Well now, Sister, you say that it must be detested because it brought about the death of Our Lord. When the Pharisees saw that the people were following Him and leaving them behind, they began to have feelings of envy against Him and, from that time on, sought how to take His life. Envy must have had great power to bring about the death of an incarnate God. *Mon Dieu*! Sisters, it was envy that led Judas to sell Our Lord. We can say that it has great power once it is embedded in the mind, since it led to the death of the author of life itself.

AAnd you, Sister, what harm do you think envy does to a Sister?@

AFirst of all, Father, it takes away peace of conscience; this is a very great evil, especially since, when we=re not at peace interiorly, there's nothing but trouble and sadness. Another thing is that envy may be the cause of loss of vocation, for when sadness takes hold of us we feel

nothing but disgust, everything distresses us and, in the end, that could lead us out of the Company. It seems to me that one means of preventing envy is to reject such thoughts as soon as we=re aware of them.@

AGod bless you, Sister! And you, Sister, what evils would envy and jealousy bring about in the Company?@

AFather, it can cause great disorders and even the loss of vocation; for, as soon as we imagine that others are preferred to us, we grow sad and discouraged, and that's the end of us.@

AAh! how right you are, Sister, in saying that's the end of us when we reach that stage. So you think envy is powerful enough to lead to the loss of vocation?@

AYes, Father, because we become jealous when we see that our Sister is better loved, more cherished and esteemed, more virtuous; and so we grow weary and want to abandon everything. I think the remedy for that is to reflect that she's more deserving of it than we are; if she's more esteemed than we and placed in more lofty ministries, it's because she's better qualified for them than we are.@

AYou see, Sisters, when a Sister spends more time with Superiors, when she talks to them more often, and it seems to you that she's better loved than the others, you=re mistaken. >But she's always talking to Mademoiselle or the Sister Servant!= Do you think, Sisters, that she's more highly regarded because of that? No, no, it's not that they have greater esteem for her. A father who has two sons, one grown up and the other little, hardly ever speaks to the older one, but he hugs the little one, talks to him, and plays with him. Do you think this father loves that little boy more than the older one because he talks to him so often? No, without a doubt he loves the other one more; and when he makes his will he'll leave more to the older boy than to the little one. So, when the Superioress talks to a Sister more often, it's not a sign that she's better loved than the others. If she shows her more affection and tenderness, perhaps it's because that Sister is distressed, demoralized, and beset with troubles, and therefore needs the gentleness and kindness shown in that circumstance. We have to sympathize with her. Our Lord himself demands it.

ADo you remember, dear Sisters, what is said about the prodigal son? The prodigal asks his father for his fortune, leaves home, and goes off to spend it. After he has dissipated everything, to the point of being forced to live on the food that's given to pigs, he makes up his mind to go back home. As soon as the father sees him, he begins to rejoice, >Ah!= he says, >it's my son! I'll entertain him; I'll give him a banquet; I'll have the fatted calf killed; he shall be given fine clothes, and people will rejoice at my child's return!= *Eh bien*! Sisters, see how this father hugs the poor dejected fellow; he embraces him and gives a great banquet; in a word, the whole house is filled with joy. Is it because he loves him more than the elder son, who has given him nothing but satisfaction? No, but it is because he's more worthy of compassion on account of his misery.

AWhen the elder son came in from the fields and saw the stringed instruments and all the preparations going on in the house, he was saddened. >Look at this!= he says, >this is how my father treats my brother, who never gave him anything but grief, and he's never shown such affection for me, even though I=ve tried to obey him in everything. Is that the reward he gives him? It looks as if he's giving him a wedding feast.= It was envy that made the elder brother talk like that; he thought his brother was being preferred to him. Although the father might seem to love the prodigal more than the other one, it's certain that he loved the older son much more, and with good reason.

AYou see from this example, Sisters, that if greater affection is shown to some than to others,

it’s not because they=re loved more. You=re quite mistaken, and please don’t think that it’s for that reason. When you see a Sister with the Superioress more often, you should think that there’s some reason for it; maybe she’s an Officer who needs advice about something she has to do, or a Sister who has a problem and is being consoled. So, think again, Sisters, and never allow yourselves to give in to such thoughts because it would be a mistake to believe that Superiors loved one Sister more than another; this is a snare the evil spirit uses to trip you up.

ASister, is there any reason to fear that envy may infect the Company; and what harm could it cause the Sisters?@

AIt seems to me, Father, that envy begets jealousy; the result is that we envy everything others have, and are annoyed when we see that they=re better off than we are.@

AThat’s well said: envy begets jealousy; well said, Sister. God bless you! Listen to what she’s saying, Sisters: if envy fills a Sister’s mind, it begets jealousy, jealousy begets division, and then all is lost; it’s the source of all the evils that occur in a house. I don’t think I=ve ever seen disorder arise in any religious Order except through envy or jealousy. Now, if envy is to be feared anywhere, it’s among you, all the more so since it’s like the corruption of the Company. When fruit is spoiled and rotten, it’s no longer good for anything; in the same way, if envy takes hold among you, your Company will soon go to rack and ruin. Ah, Sisters! could a greater misfortune befall the Daughters of Charity than jealousy, since it’s the cause of disunion? What good is there where there’s division? Rest assured, then, that as soon as there’s envy in your Company, it’s finished; you=re Daughters of Charity in name only, you don’t have its interior signs. That’s why you can say, Sisters, that as soon as we see that vice embedded in this poor house, it’s time for the funeral of our poor Company; it no longer exists; it’s dead. And how is that? Because you=re Daughters of Charity, daughters of the love of God and of your neighbor; and the opposite of charity is envy. A Sister who has this spirit, instead of being the daughter of God that she was, becomes a daughter of the demon, a daughter of perdition. What a misfortune to become the daughter of the devil! You see, the executioner of the Daughters of Charity is envy, which causes us to be angry when we see our Sister better cared for during her illness, or sought after in a parish because she does so much good, or better dressed than we are. For that’s what envy does. As soon as a Sister reaches that point, say, >She’s no longer a Daughter of Charity; she’s divested of the interior habit, which is the love of God and of the neighbor.= Ah! but we have our attire! Poor Sister, it’s not the dress that makes you a Daughter of Charity; it’s the interior habit of the soul.

ASo, envy concerns external goods. It also concerns reputation. A Sister is sick at heart because such a one is more highly esteemed, or is being considered for some duty or other, or has the reputation of walking in the presence of God, or gives good example to all those who are with her. The demon makes us envy all that. I have to say that so far we have reason to praise God. I=ve seen very few who have given me any disedification in the city. I can think of only one Sister, who went on her way swinging something she was carrying in her hand. That’s all I’ll mention here. Perhaps she was planning to offer it to someone. If she’s here, let her ask pardon of God for this fault and for the bad example she gave by her thoughtlessness.

AWatch out for that, Sisters; evil thoughts are a worm that gnaws the heart, takes away peace, and causes us pain, not only to see others being esteemed, but also for the interior gifts of the soul and that such a Sister is humble and is considered a saint. The devil makes us envious of all that.

AYou see, dear Sisters, you must detest envy, not only because Holy Scripture shows us that it

had the power to cause the death of Our Lord, but also because it brought sin into the world. Accordingly, we can say that all the evils occurring in a Company are caused by envy; have no doubt about it, as also that all the sins in the world originated with envy.

ASister, do you think envy can destroy the Company?@

AI do, Father, because it divides those who let themselves be carried away by it and, when there's no longer union among us, the Company will soon be brought low.@

AYes, Sisters, because you are daughters of love; and envy is totally contrary to charity. It's like fire and water, opposed to one other. And just as there's great incompatibility between these two elements, it's the same for envy and charity. Now, just as water extinguishes fire, envy extinguishes and kills charity. And when people see envy in the Company, they'll despise you, and rightly so, saying, >*Quoi*! are these the Sisters of whom we=ve heard so much? Shame on them; they=re not fit to distribute the alms of respectable people; persons who do so should be charitable.=

AThat's how envy can destroy the Company of the Daughters of Charity. And how many has it upset? Because of it, several have disbanded and disappeared, and a short while ago two Companies in Paris were suppressed because of the envy in them. An entire Order, called *Scuola Pia*,[1] has been overturned, except for one house, which they still have in a certain kingdom. These are powerful motives to induce you to abhor this cursed sin, dear Sisters. Let's now see how we can sin by envy.@

One Sister replied that it's self-love that causes us to sin by envy; that excessive love for ourselves causes us to be upset when others are preferred to us; that we can sin in this by thought, believing that we certainly are as deserving of being given a particular duty as the person in it, who doesn't have much knowledge or experience. We can also sin by word, saying that some are preferred to others and receive more support, etc.

AGod bless you, Sister! You say that envy is shown by words and that we can offend God in this, and you=re right. If, therefore, we see a Sister speaking often to the Sister Servant, and we=re inclined to envy her, we'll think, >What is she saying to her?= If she has a dress that's different from what others have, even though this may be from necessity, we'll think it's made of better fabric, for the devil makes use of all that. One day a Sister said to me in tears, >Monsieur, one of the things I dread most is to be a Sister Servant.= Sisters, think about the words of that good Sister. Those who aspire to that are far removed from such sentiments! What a sorry state they=re in! It's the devil who incites them to that. Search your memory to see if, until now, you=ve had these desires. If you still have them, ah, poor Sister! what state are you in? If there's ever something you should fear, it's that. If you feel tainted with this vice, ask God earnestly to free you from it and, if you have any tears, shed them before His Goodness to obtain it. Don't rest until you=re rid of it, and say, >My God, how can You allow a Daughter of Charity to be a daughter of the devil, who is pride!= For the devil and pride are one and the same; if you have envy, which is its daughter, you are the daughter of the devil. *Quoi*! is it possible for a Daughter of Charity not to suffer by being in that state! She=d have to be unaware of God! A Sister who thinks she's guilty should have no rest until she has won her deliverance from the Divine Goodness. She must ask for the prayers of others and beg her Sister to obtain this grace from God for her; if she meets some good religious, let her say to him, >I entreat you, Father, to ask God to deliver me from an accursed proud thought that is tormenting me: I want to be a Sister Servant. Obtain from His Goodness that He will free me from this temptation.=

ARecently, a Prelates= meeting was held for the election of a Superior. Two of those good

Prelates wrote to me about it, and I also wrote to them on this matter. When they were on the point of naming the Superior, those good Fathers from that Order began to shed bitter tears for fear that they might be raised to that office, which they knew was too burdensome for them. The Archbishop of Narbonne and the Bishop of Alet[2] wrote me that words cannot express how edified they were by the humility of those Fathers. Indeed, Sisters, aren't positions of authority onerous and dangerous for those who seek them? How far removed they were from envy!

AThe means of finding a remedy for envy, then, is neither to desire such positions nor to set great value on them. We send Sisters to a new establishment, such as we=ve done for Poland; Sisters shouldn't be thinking that they=d be suitable for that.

ASo, Sisters, there you have sufficient reasons to make you want to be freed from envy, if you have any. You know the misfortune of a soul who is jealous. It's a diabolical state. We must rid ourselves of envy, if we want to persevere and don't want God to abandon us, especially since He gives His grace to the humble and resists the proud.

ASister, what are the means of combating envy?@

AI think, Father, that the best means is to ask Our Lord for humility,@

AWell now, that's one means, it's a thought God has given you. Another is to bring before our minds the example of the saints so as never to be ambitious about anything whatsoever. A further means is to reflect that this is displeasing to God. Do you think, Sister, that a good means of not sinning by envy is to love patched clothes?@

AYes, I do, Father.@

AIt's certain that a very good means is to be satisfied with shabby clothes and to be distressed when you=re given new ones, far from wanting to have better clothes than others, and to say to Mlle Le Gras, >Mademoiselle, that dress is too good for me. You=re making me too pretty. Don't you know that I'm proud already, and this will only make me more so? I'm too vain and filled with envy! That's why I don't deserve to be dressed that way.= That's how you should act, Sisters.

AAnd you, Sister, what are the means of not falling into the sin of envy.@

AIt seems to me, Father, that one means is always to seek after the most insignificant things.@

AYou=re quite right, Sister. And when we=re given something more than is given to others, we should blush for shame. When you see yourselves better dressed than poor persons, you should blush for shame and confusion, Sisters, because the poor are your masters and you are their servants; therefore, you should have less than they do.@

AFather, I think it's also a good means to reject promptly every thought tending toward envy, without trying to scrutinize them too closely.@

AThat's what I like to hear! Sister says that as soon as you have an envious thought, you shouldn't wait until tomorrow but reject it immediately as if it were poison. Ah, but it will return! If it does, begin over again and urge all the good people you know to ask God to free you of an accursed thought that's trying to ruin you; ask your Sister to tell you something to help you to dispel the envy that's tormenting you, and ask Our Lord to free you from it. >My God, grant me the grace of never wanting to be the Sister Servant. You gave it to the Sister who wept for fear of being one and asked Mademoiselle never to make her one.= Afterward, go at once to your confessor; hurry here to Mademoiselle and to M. Portail, declare yourself openly and confess as follows: >I accuse myself of having an accursed thought of envy against my Sister; and afterward

I allowed myself so many times to say some arrogant, contemptuous words.= That's how you should confess because envy usually causes people to fall into this fault.

AIf you hear something good said about a Sister of whom you=re jealous, you'll say that it isn't the case: >She's not even as good as you say; you don't know her; she's a real hypocrite,= and similar expressions. For that's the work of the devil; he stirs up jealousy with regard to the good and the virtue practiced and, if no fault can be found in the deed, the intention is attacked and is regarded as not being pure but simply capricious. What disorder when that happens, Sisters!

AOne of the greatest evils that can happen in the Company is if the Sisters--I'm speaking of some and not of all because I know that some of you live very virtuously; *Mon Dieu*! what holy souls there have been in the Company, and still are!--is, I repeat, if you were to discuss one another's failings. When you come here you sometimes question one other, >And who is in the house with you now? How do you get along? Is your Sister kind? Isn't she bad-tempered? And what about that other Sister, in such or such a parish, what's she like? Do you get along well together?= The others, in reply, will mention the things that annoy them: >Ah, Sister! I get on so badly with Sister X. She's so rude to me. She's always scolding; she does this or that,= and many other things that are said on such occasions. Dear Sisters, never open your mouth to talk about your Sisters. Converse, rather, about good things such as your Rules, the service you=re rendering to poor persons, and how many they are, so as not to give rise to these bad conversations. And when you=re asked, >How are you getting along in the parish where you are?= I entreat you, Sister, to reply as follows: >Let's remember that it's forbidden for us to talk about these matters and about our Sisters.=

AThat's what you should do, Sisters. If a Sister persists, stop listening to her and leave; for, by listening to such talk, you encourage her to continue. That's why theologians say of those who listen to uncharitable persons that they=re as guilty as those who do the talking; and this is true, because it's in our power to prevent it, and we don=t. That's why we sin just as much--and more--than they do.

AWhen you come here, never report what you=re doing, nor the difficulties you may be having with one another, but talk about something good, the means of improving yourselves and of acquiring the virtues you need so as to encourage one another to persevere. By so doing, you'll avoid many temptations that arise from such conversations.

AMademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts on this subject?@

AFather, what Your Charity said, along with the thoughts of our Sisters, is sufficient to warn us of the danger that this accursed spirit of envy and jealousy may infect the Company in general and each one in particular. Reflecting on this today, it seemed to me that it might have been envy as well as pride that caused Lucifer to become an inhabitant of hell instead of the angel of light he once had been, since this accursed sin is like a worm that gnaws constantly until it has destroyed itself, or is destroyed.

AAn envious or jealous spirit gives itself no rest and incessantly persecutes, from near or far, the envious person, who thus cannot attain any perfection and is always in danger of being lost.

AEnvy and jealousy are two passions which, like oil, diffuse themselves aimlessly as far as they are inclined, but their usual practice is to cause aversion, to be displeased at seeing the temporal or spiritual well-being of the person envied, to be unable to bear that any good be said of them. In a word, they=re a source that constantly generates occasions to offend God and to act contrary to the charity we owe our neighbor.

AThe means to prevent ourselves from becoming habituated to this wicked vice are to consider that it's directly opposed to the Will of God and one of the greatest impediments to perfection, and often to repeat attentively the Commandments of God in order to recall to mind our obligation to do to others as we want them to do to us.@

ABlessed be God, Mademoiselle! Well now, Sisters, I'll just make a brief comment on that. First, people say that all those who commit sin receive some satisfaction from it: the thief, for example, has the money he steals and he spends it; the glutton has the satisfaction of eating fine foods. In short, from every sin people imagine that they'll get some pleasure, but in the case of envy they can't expect any satisfaction; on the contrary, it's an executioner who immediately punishes those consumed by it. Look at an envious person: everything causes her pain; if she hears some good of a Sister whom she envies, it torments the life out of her and causes her to languish. Sometimes she feels that people really don't know her, and sometimes that, by esteeming that other Sister, they are despising her.

AThe envious person may be compared to a man who has a tapeworm inside him. You know what agonies such people suffer; those worms gnaw at their hearts and give them no rest. Now, all those who have envy in their souls have a tapeworm. >Envy,= says the Holy Spirit, >rots the bones of those consumed by it.=[3] What a misfortune for envious persons! To be worse off than those with tapeworms in their bodies! Ah, Sisters! who among you will not dread falling into this vice? Let's give ourselves to God, beginning today, never to envy the welfare of others, but rather to want the lowliest and most difficult ministry and the shabbiest clothing, looking upon ourselves as the least of all, and always being satisfied with what we have.

AWhat will help you a great deal is for you to confess the sins you=ve committed through envy, making a firm purpose of amendment. In that way, Sisters, you can be sure that God will bless the Company and that, wherever people request the Daughters of Charity, they'll be an edification, the whole Company will enjoy a good reputation, and God will give you the full measure of grace in this world and glory in the next.

AMay Our Lord grant us the grace of helping us to understand and detest this accursed vice, so contrary to charity! I ask the Divine Goodness that the words of blessing I'm about to pronounce on His behalf may be operative in your hearts and mine, so that the wicked sin of envy may be driven out of them forever, and we may live henceforth in such a way that it may never find its way into them!@

A*Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .*@