

Thèmes -Instructions of St. Julie

ORIGIN OF THE THEMES

One day when we were all in St. Ignace, writes one of the first sisters, our devoted Mère Julie found us there practising our writing. "See," said our Mother, "let us find a means of improving ourselves in several ways at one and the same time. You shall write your essays on the instructions given every evening, and after they have been corrected, you can copy them out in good handwriting on fresh sheets of paper as practice in writing. In this way you will train your minds, nourish your souls, learn how to express yourselves properly, how to spell and write, all at the same time, and so make progress in everything at once, besides having the advantage of occupying your time as well."

It was in this way that our Reverend Mère Julie found means to multiply time in order to render more glory to God. Many a time our Mother would say: "You must do all you can to acquire the knowledge and education necessary for training the young in solid learning. I do not mean to say that you must try to become learned women, or that I want to make the aim of our Institute consist in knowledge. No, far from it. We must work at our studies to acquire knowledge solely that we may use it as a bait to catch souls in order to give them to God."

Our Mother often paid short and unexpected visits to St. Ignace, and on these occasions she would look at our exercises, encourage us in our efforts, and enkindle our zeal for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. She often warned us against the abuse which so easily slips in among those devoted to study of becoming too attached to one's books, lest exercises of piety might be sacrificed in favour of exercises given in class. She used to say "If I saw a sister sacrificing in this way the true basis of our vocation to what is only one of the means of attaining our end, I should withdraw her from all teaching as unfit to do God's work in a manner worthy of him." More than once Mère Julie laid down this principle with great firmness, and on one occasion she withdrew from her studies a sister who had great aptitude for learning, but who gave herself to it without the necessary spirit of detachment.

All this goes to prove the love our Mother had for that total interior stripping of self-love so necessary to an apostolic soul. The fact is the more remarkable because Mère Julie made this sacrifice of a good mistress - capable as well as talented - at a time when there were few sisters of that type. We felt still more strongly that she was guided by the spirit of God in all she did, and that with admirable purity of intention she sought nothing but the glory of God alone. Sometimes during the evening instruction the essays we had composed were read aloud. More than once our venerated Mother showed, by the tears in her eyes, how touched she was to see how well we savoured "the words the good God put into her mouth for us," as she used to say. To encourage us she would allow questions to be asked about any point which we did not understand.

I : CHARITY

1. The Spirit of Charity

Charity is a divine virtue emanating from the adorable heart of Jesus. Holy charity reigns amid the inhabitants of heaven and is the source of the delights experienced by the blessed who abide there, and whose hearts are filled to overflowing with love of God and of one another. Our Institute must be an image of heaven by the reign within it of perfect charity:

CHARITY OF HEART AND MIND - universal love of all, but especially of our sisters.

CHARITY IN OUR BEHAVIOUR - that constant kindness and consideration for others which makes us help those who are tired by taking the hardest work on ourselves.

CHARITY IN OUR WORDS - suppressing quick retorts and any words which might give pain to others.

CHARITY OF FORBEARANCE - for since we all have different characters and dispositions we ought to bear patiently whatever may wound us in our contact with one another.

We must help, respect, uphold and love one another, for mutual love soon mellows harshness of character; in heaven charity will cost us nothing, we shall enjoy its reward and its delights without any self-denial being required, but while we are on earth the practice of charity demands forgetfulness of self, abnegation and sacrifice.

My dear sisters, our Lord said to his apostles: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (Jn.13:35). A maxim singularly worthy of the loving heart of Jesus, I say the same to you. You will be recognised as true Sisters of Notre Dame, holy spouses of Jesus Christ, and my daughters, if you have true love for one another, if sisterly charity binds you together as mortar unites into one whole the stones of a building, for our holy Institute is a building raised to the greater glory of God.

2. Charity requires a humble spirit - a spirit of Faith

If we all work at making holy charity reign among us, refusing none of the sacrifices God asks of us in order to promote union of hearts, our Holy Institute will be the delight of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the chosen garden of our Blessed Lady. Such union will be a source of edification not only to Holy Mother Church but to the whole world, and will contribute to the glory of God and the salvation of souls; moreover, so long as there is among us but one heart and one soul, we ourselves shall be happy and peaceful, and able to make great progress in the spiritual life.

Charity is a chain which links souls to Jesus Christ and to one another, a chain which cannot be broken without causing sorrow to the Heart of Jesus, and scandal in the Church. The strength of charity lies in a spirit of humility, that holy littleness which makes each one consider herself the least of all. Another source of charity is a spirit of recollection, submission and mortification, together with great generosity and zeal for the glory of God. But the main source of charity is a spirit of faith which makes us see, love and serve Jesus Christ in the person of each of our sisters. Should a worldly spirit ever creep in among us, it would bring a crowd of evils in its train; the spirit of ownership, jealousy, self-conceit and love of power. Such faults would soon make a break in the rampart of holy charity. Let us often beg the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of our

dear Mother Mary that the spirit of charity and unworldliness may always be preserved among us. If we ever had the misfortune of seeing worldly people received into our communities, we should immediately feel charity growing cold, and that would be the forerunner of complete relaxation in our holy Institute.

3. **Charity "beareth all things"**

If our good Saviour has left us an example of every virtue, he reveals his whole character in the example and practice of charity, which is the most admirable expression of his adorable heart.

We ought to excel in practising the reality of this virtue in all its completeness, for charity reigns as queen in the heart of our Divine Spouse, and sets upon us all the seal which shows that we belong to God and to the Institute of Notre Dame. Nevertheless, our charity must not be limited by the love we have for one another, it must make our hearts as wide as the universe, and destroy in them every particle of resentment. When people in the world speak slightly of our Institute, which is but in its infancy, when they wish us ill or injure us, we must pray for them and say, as did our Divine Saviour upon the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). O holy and incomprehensible charity of our good Jesus, give us a great love of our enemies.

To be a good Sister of Notre Dame it is necessary to bear with all kinds of characters, to put up patiently with the faults and defects of others, to suppress the least movement of wounded self-love. All this is quite easy to a heart that loves God even a little, to one who meditates on the example and lessons given us by our Divine Saviour and model, Jesus Christ our Lord. The good God never walks hand-in-hand with anyone who offends against charity.

4. **The qualities of charity**

Charity must be the distinctive virtue of Sisters of Notre Dame. It must unite them all as members of one family, and guide them in the education of the children whom they make profession of instructing. What characteristics must our charity have with regard to these young girls?

FIRST - its motives must be supernatural. We must love our children, not because they are attractive, or because their disposition suits us; love such as this would not be worthy of our holy calling. We must love them because they are created to the image of God, and purchased at the price of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. It is on these grounds alone that our children should be dear to us, and it is on this account that they deserve all we can do for them.

Again, our charity must be universal. It would be unworthy of a Sister of Notre Dame if any one of us set limits to her charity and devoted herself only to those who have lovable characters, or are without glaring faults. We must love all souls, and put up with the most difficult characters, as well as with the most perverse and annoying in order to gain their souls for God. Every one, without exception, ought to be dear to us, because all are dear to Jesus Christ; there is not a single one to whom he refuses his divine life and the last drop of his precious blood.

If there is room for any preference at all in the heart of a Sister of Notre Dame, it ought to be for the souls most destitute of the gifts of nature and grace, in order to win them for our Lord.

LASTLY - our charity must be efficacious in good works. We must not confine ourselves to instructing the young, and cultivating souls in a vague sort of way. Rather must we employ every

possible means to instil Christian principles into the hearts of our children, and train them to solid virtue. We must establish them in the love of God, form their consciences aright, and teach them the value of holy purity.

If you obtain these results your work will be permanent, and in heaven you will meet again the souls you have gained to God while you were on earth. If we do not accomplish these things, our love is sterile. Charity has sure ways of gaining souls and of giving them to Jesus Christ. But for this we must devote ourselves, be ready to spend and to be spent, to wear ourselves out in practices of expiation in order to win back to innocence the souls of children who may have offended God grievously. A Sister of Notre Dame must be ready to face anything for the sake of saving souls.

5. Motives for charity

Charity is born of God, my dear sisters, and is quite distinct from what the world calls cordiality or politeness, because it springs from humility. Religious who possess this lovable virtue always endeavour to hide the faults of their sisters; to bear patiently the shortcomings of their children; to act with meekness as did our loving Saviour, whose charity was so well known, so tender and loving that it drew all hearts. He received with gentle sweetness all sinners and those who were happy. All sorts and conditions of men approached our Lord without fear or embarrassment. He, who was purity itself, never sent away those who spoke evil against him. In like manner we should go halfway to meet those who wish us ill and thus disarm their purpose by holy charity.

A Sister of Notre Dame must never be rebuffed by evil dispositions or ingratitude because beneath this external rind which causes pain to her natural self-love, she will always find a soul created to the image of God, and ransomed by the precious blood of our Lord. If we were humble and zealous for souls we should easily bear calumnies uttered against us, for we should recognise that, in God's sight, what men attribute to us is even less than what, in strict justice, we really deserve. Charity enables us to pay our debt towards God, because from charity springs zeal for souls.

6. Our Lord's commandment

The spirit of our holy Institute is a spirit of charity, of mutual support, and union one with another. In order that each Sister of Notre Dame may be completely filled with this spirit, she ought to take to heart and meditate upon our Lord's words to his apostles, when, on the eve of his sacred passion, he besought them to be united among themselves, and to love one another as he had loved them. My dear sisters, these words of our divine saviour are especially addressed to us, for we have been called by God through his gratuitous grace, to live together in community. Our Lord desires to see in every religious house that peace and harmony which are the fruits of charity. Never can we make too many sacrifices in order to preserve charity, and practise our Lord's commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). He gave his life for us. We shall never be able to do as much as that, but in the cause of charity let us sacrifice our own self-love, our tastes and preferences, and the good God will be pleased and his holy name will be glorified. (A community like ours necessitates that sisters of different nationalities should live together, but charity, making no account of that, realises that we are all one nation in Jesus Christ.) How pleasing to the heart of Jesus is a soul adorned with holy charity. In her heart our Lord takes his delight, and she draws innumerable blessings upon the community. With one little grain of faith, my dear sisters, each one can practise heroic charity, because it is the good God himself who is present with us in the person of our neighbour.

II : THE SPIRIT OF SIMPLICITY

1. A simple soul is loved by God and man.

Those who embrace religious life in the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame must aspire to become saints, and endeavour to attain a high degree of the love of God. They will effect this by striving to acquire the virtue of simplicity. All the saints in heaven reached eminent sanctity and perfect love only because they practised thoroughly the beautiful virtue of simplicity. No doubt they possessed heroic virtues as well, but, my dear sisters, if these had not been accompanied by the practice of simplicity - that special mark of the children of God - all the rest would have been in vain, and they would never have gained heaven.

This truth is taught us by our Lord himself as recorded in several passages of the gospels: "Unless you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt.18:3). A soul possessed of this childlike simplicity is tenderly loved by God, for a simple soul is always united to him, and has only one desire - to love him more and more. That is why the saints say that simplicity is a continual act of love, or rather an habitual state of perfect love of God.

A Sister of Notre Dame must work unceasingly to acquire that unfeigned simplicity without which her courage will fail at the least difficulty, and all her work will be barren. O my God, grant that all my daughters may understand and love this divine virtue of simplicity!

2. Simplicity necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame

It can be rightly said that a community numbering among its members souls anchored in simplicity possesses a great treasure. Religious who practise this virtue are as brilliant lamps illuminating the whole community with their good example. Example is always more effective than mere words. It is useless to give good advice or make long discourses if your conduct does not confirm your speech; mere words make no impression. A community in which good example is not given is a hell upon earth. Indeed, my dear sisters, if I did not see you striving to help one another by making constant efforts to give good example, I would not remain among you another minute. This is why I urge you to acquire simplicity, for without it you can never obtain solid virtue, and as a consequence, you will never edify others.

Without simplicity no other virtue is possible because simplicity leads directly to God; no other virtue can be found except along that road, also, without simplicity there can be no true Sister of Notre Dame. Simplicity makes us obedient, renders openness of heart easy, and helps souls to be great and courageous. Simplicity sees God's will and feels his help in everything. A simple soul who seeks God alone counts on his support, and becomes strong and capable of anything and everything, because it trusts entirely to him.

3. How to acquire Simplicity

What is simplicity? Simplicity, my dear child, is I think, what Brother Giles once said to another friar to whom he kept singing: "One to one, One to one!" That is to say "A soul alone with God alone." Or again simplicity is like that beautiful plant they call a sunflower which follows all the movements of the sun and ever turns towards it. Even so, the mind and heart of a religious who possesses the virtue of simplicity are always turned towards God alone from whom she receives the

light which beautifies and guides her, and the warmth which vivifies her.

Simplicity helps us to make great progress in sanctity, all the more so because a simple soul puts no obstacles in the way of grace and has neither will nor judgement of her own. Her soul is like a clear crystal into which the rays of the sun of justice penetrate bringing light and warmth. As a rule, a simple soul has no other practices than the duties of her state of life; her sole preoccupation is to look at God and to do what is pleasing to him in whatever circumstances he places her. Sometimes such a soul experiences great repugnance to doing this, but she conquers it by setting aside her own feelings, and turning her thoughts elsewhere; by this means she is able to make progress, deliberately refusing to see anything to dislike. She commits faults now and then, but quickly recovers herself by looking at God simply, humbly and trustfully. A simple soul surrenders herself entirely to the good pleasure of God which she desires to accomplish in all things. Both sweet and bitter she receives from the hand, or rather, from the heart of her God, never letting her thoughts dwell on secondary causes. The simple soul is always happy, my dear sisters, always at peace, no matter what emotions arise in the inferior part of her nature.

4. Simplicity looks to God alone

It seems to me that a sister who is simple faithfully shuts out from her mind all thoughts which do not tend towards God. Such a sister ignores what goes on in her imagination with regard to anything likely to disturb her, or that might tarnish or trouble her soul. By taking unremitting care to avoid all curiosity and waste of time, we become simple and disposed for union with God who is simple being.

Do you know what a simple soul should do when confronted with temptations, trouble and difficulties? So far as regards a Sister of Notre Dame she should not (as do so many others) seek light and help by a multitude of reflections, but she should go in all humility to tell her trouble to her superior, and nearly always this would suffice to allay it. If however, the good God desired to prolong her trial, she would suffer in peace, not worrying herself by constantly thinking of her difficulties, because she knows very well that is not one of the means appointed by God for obtaining peace of soul. She will seek peace by sincere openness of heart with those appointed by God to be her guides and by perfect trust in God, who often gives a trustful soul sufficient light to disperse the clouds of spiritual darkness without any other help being necessary.

Once again I repeat, my dear sisters, that simplicity consists in having but one object and purpose in view - God alone. To be simple of heart means likewise and that we refer all our thoughts, all our affection, to one sole object - God alone.

5. Simplicity helps perfect obedience

If we desire to know who receives the plenitude of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, my dear sisters, we have not far to seek, for a few moments' thought will make us understand that this plenitude is given to those who possess the beautiful virtue of simplicity, simplicity of heart and mind.

Simplicity is indispensable to Sisters of Notre Dame who make profession of seeking only the greater glory of God, and devote themselves to the practice of blind obedience.

O blessed simplicity of blind obedience which makes us lose our own eyes to see with the eyes of God, through those of our superior and which gives us no other will than the will of God. Simplicity gives to those who practise it that uprightness of heart which is so pleasing to God that

holy scripture says in speaking of King David: "I have found David, a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my wills" (Acts 13:22).

6. **Simplicity the foundation of the Institute of Notre Dame**

Simplicity is one of the sweetest and easiest of all virtues. Nevertheless it is astonishing to see how rare it is, and how much neglected, even by those desirous of living a virtuous life, if, indeed, there can be any virtue in a soul that is not simple. Those who possess the virtue of simplicity are never hypocritical, they never pretend to be what they are not. The more simple we become, the more like we are to God, in the measure in which man can become like to God. For God is simple being, and souls that are perfectly simple draw near to him and grow into his likeness. Simplicity must be the base and foundation of the Institute of Notre Dame.

7. **Behaviour of a simple soul**

When a simple soul speaks to God, she lays all her needs before him simply and trustfully, as a little child would tell its father what it wants. Having thus made known her necessities, she talks to the good God with the simplicity of a dove: "See, dear God, it is quite time you did grant me the grace I need. Do not, I beg of you, be deaf to my entreaty. Thou hast already given me greater graces than this, so thy love cannot refuse me the little favour I am asking now."

"When a simple soul makes herself known to her superior, she speaks in a way which edifies them. In a few words she makes herself better known than a less straightforward person would in a whole year. It is the thought of her last end which moves her to do this. She thinks of herself as standing before the judgement seat of God, and seeing him in her superior, she says: "I must show my superior all the wounds of my soul as truthfully as God will show them to me when he comes to judge me. Nothing is hidden from him, therefore I must not hide anything from my superior." If shame should tempt her to keep silence, she will say: "Why should I not bear this shame with courage and joy, seeing that it is only before my superior who holds the place of God, rather than expose myself to much greater confusion in the sight of all men because I failed in openness with my superiors." The science of sanctity, and therefore of simplicity can only be learnt at the foot of the Cross.

8. **Simplicity, a characteristic of a Sister of Notre Dame**

A simple soul is humble and obedient; humble because she is content to be known as she really is and never excuses herself since whatever faults are pointed out to her, she knows that they are less than those she recognises in herself; obedient because she never grumbles, always consenting interiorly to whatever exterior duty she has to perform. Should it seem to her necessary to make some representation to her superiors, she makes it in all simplicity, then leaves herself entirely in the hands of those set over her. How pleasing to God is a simple soul, and how much loved by all who can appreciate solid virtue.

Of all virtues, simplicity is the one most necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame. Without it there is no possibility of working for the greater glory of God in our Institute, because unless a soul is deeply rooted in simplicity she is taken up with herself; she likes to practise virtue, but only according to her own ideas, her own opinion is her sole guide in all she does. A Sister of Notre Dame ought to be a type of true simplicity, acting in everything with straightforward goodwill. A ball has neither head nor tail. A Sister of Notre Dame should allow herself to be used by her superiors as a ball; she must show neither the head of self-will nor the tail of discontent, which latter is recognised by the

murmurings of self-love.

Simplicity of mind and of heart are inseparable. Anyone possessed of true simplicity always preserves peace of soul and tranquil evenness of temper. When a soul is thoroughly grounded in simplicity nothing can disturb her; neither changes of time or place, nor sufferings and inconvenience. Nothing throws her off her balance, nothing disturbs her, because she realises that God arranges or permits all that happens, and she loves him so much that she always accepts his good pleasure with a smile; no matter what it may be.

9. **A simple soul is always happy**

A soul that is simple in mind and heart has no will or judgement of her own; she never has the least remark to make on anything which obedience prescribes. Blind to her own interests, she seeks only the interests of God and his holy will as it is manifested to her by her superiors. How happy is the soul that has acquired the habit of blind obedience, a habit which springs from true simplicity. Such a one awaits tranquilly and peacefully all that is ordained. To do, or to leave undone is all the same to her, even if what she is told to do seems wanting in good sense, it makes no difference. For her it is sufficient to know that such-and-such a thing has been arranged by her superiors, for in them she sees her God, and flies to do his will.

A soul like this is always happy, whereas another, who is a prey to self-will and her own ideas is always discontented. In fact, of such a religious as the latter it can be said without exaggeration that she lives in an anticipated hell. Why is this, my dear sisters? Because she is continually being crossed and every moment she is in dread lest something disagreeable should be asked of her. A simple soul, on the other hand flies to obey the least sign given by authority, even if it comes from someone in a subordinate post. Without waiting to ask who gave the order, or why, or how, she goes to execute it at once, no matter what she is doing, even should it be so holy an employment as kneeling at the feet of Jesus Christ our Lord absorbed in contemplation, or weeping over her own sins and those of all mankind. Her prayer is cut short, her inclinations sacrificed without a word, and that very fact sweetens all the orders of obedience. Such a soul well knows that if she began to question what her superiors command, examination might lead to repugnance, and repugnance to refusal. Rather than risk offending God in this way, she submits blindly to everything with the simplicity of a little child.

10. **Difference between simplicity of mind and of heart**

When something difficult is imposed by obedience and we submit without reasoning about it, we practise simplicity of mind. Then the intellect, having already yielded, proposes this duty to the heart. If the heart accepts and accomplishes what is required, we practise at one and the same time simplicity of the mind and heart. It is this simplicity, this humility of heart which must be the foundation of the spiritual edifice built by every Sister of Notre Dame, and our holy Institute will be the more fragrant with the odour of Jesus Christ, the more deeply rooted it is in the love and practice of simplicity of both mind and heart.

11. **Simplicity, the hallmark of sanctity**

Christian simplicity is the virtue of the children of God. It is the infallible hallmark of sanctity. Our Lord's own words tell us this: "Suffer children to come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt.18:3).

A simple soul enjoys unalterable peace so far as that is possible here below. She lives in forgetfulness of self and indifference towards all creatures. She has no dislikes except of those things in which God cannot be found, such as intercourse with worldly people, for Christian simplicity has no part with worldly prudence. A simple soul knows nothing of the faults of her neighbour, and gets on with even the most difficult characters. She finds real happiness in being corrected and never takes offence when things go against her, nor does she seek to find out whether what is done is right or wrong.

A simple soul, a really simple soul, penetrates deep into the mystery of the folly of the cross, and God grants sweet familiarity with him in prayer only to souls that are perfectly simple. Holy Job says: "The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn. The lamp despised in the thoughts of the rich is ready for the time appointed" (Job,12:5).

12. Simplicity gives peace

It is always the intellect that suggests things to the heart. These things are sometimes sinful, but then we can always refuse them admittance. A simple heart always examines what the mind proposes in order to find out whether or not it leads to God. Since our heart is free and can choose what it pleases, a simple heart instantly refuses anything that does not savour of God.

A truly simple soul takes well all that is said to her. Should her superior refuse some permission she asks, she never allows any sign of disappointment to appear, because all her love is given to God and she only desires what is his will. This she is sure of doing when she obeys her superior. She also receives in great tranquillity of heart all crosses, humiliations and contradictions, because she knows that God sends them for her good. A simple soul never listens to the false suggestions of self-love.

13. Simplicity distrusts self

A simple soul is never troubled, but walks straight on in the path of duty. If she commits faults she is not astonished or upset because she knows her own weakness. Even that does not disturb her tranquil peace; for she humbles herself before the good God, asking forgiveness for her faults and thanking him for upholding her with his grace, without which she would have sunk still lower. Having done this, she continues on her way as though nothing had happened. The sight of her frailty only makes her double her trust in God. She feels more and more her need of clinging moment by moment to the guiding hand of her divine master; him she trusts, all her mistrust is of herself.

14. Simplicity helps other virtues

Simplicity is a virtue which takes us straight to God as children go to their father. Since we are the spouses of Jesus Christ we are the privileged children of God. Let us approach him with childlike trust and ask him to teach us to be as simple as doves, seeking in everything only God alone and his greater glory.

Such simplicity is characteristic of God's children because he is simple being, and his children ought to resemble their father. No true virtue can exist without simplicity, for simplicity being always accompanied by true knowledge of oneself, necessarily produces contempt of self which is true humility.

Charity being a breath from the heart of God, a simple soul easily draws near to him in prayer, and becoming filled with this spirit of charity suffers nothing within herself which does not spring from love; because she sees God in all things, a simple soul is always submissive, hence she obeys without questioning and finds nothing difficult. How happy is the soul who possesses this charming virtue of simplicity.

15. Characteristics of a simple soul

Simplicity keeps those who possess it from presuming on their own strength and confiding in their own lights, while it teaches them to put all their trust in God. No lack of truthfulness ever mars the conversation of a simple soul. Malice never lodges in her heart. Her straightforwardness endears her to all, while her humility makes her obedient without paying the least attention to what nature shrinks from. Simplicity is not natural to man, but the Holy Spirit renders a soul simple by the unction of his grace, and through the supernatural light which he bestows upon the mind. A simple soul is the delight of the heart of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in such a soul as in his temple.

A soul enriched by God with holy simplicity depends directly upon him. She sees God in all, all in God; she refuses nothing, and lives in a state of utter self-renunciation, perfectly docile to every touch of the Holy Spirit upon her soul, and accepting readily all she may have to bear from her neighbour. Nothing hinders a simple soul; she is always satisfied. She lets herself be moulded by God, and by those with whom she lives. Following the example of our divine saviour, she receives with equal peace contradictions or praise, health or sickness, life or death. Detached from all that is not God alone, she never troubles herself if anything is taken from her, nor at what is asked of her: she knows that all things come from God and lead to God.

16. A simple soul is an apostolic soul

Christian simplicity is a virtue unknown to many; only souls who practise simplicity understand it and admire its beauty. If you speak of simplicity to people in the world they do not know what you are talking about; it is the Holy Spirit who gives pure and simple souls an appreciation of this virtue.

The apostles who always lived in our Lord's own company and who daily witnessed the example set them of this virtue in the conduct of our divine master, understood nothing of it. They showed their ignorance with regard to simplicity the day they endeavoured to send away the little children who were crowding round our Lord, who said at once: "Suffer these little ones and do not forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of heaven is for such" (Matt. 19:14). And again: "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a child, shall not enter into it" (Luke 18:17). Jesus did not mean that we must go back to the natural state of childhood, but that we must become as simple as children. The apostles did not understand this wonderful lesson till after they had received the Holy Spirit.

My dear daughters, it is for you also that our Lord makes this comparison. Be as simple as children; no more grumbling when authority makes known the will of God in your regard; no more murmuring when God sees fit to send coldness, aridity and desolation during the time of prayer; faithfully stay at our Lord's feet; the more he tries you the more he loves you.

When God wants to fashion a simple soul he begins by overwhelming her with weariness and aridity in prayer. He reduces her to nothing, takes her from her very self and makes her realise that all he has asked of her is adoration; perfect adoration without words or feeling, prostrate at his feet.

A soul in a state of abasement such as this often does more for the glory of God than when she abounds in pious thoughts, virtuous acts, and great desires.

The more simple the soul, the more apostolic she is because she surrenders herself unreservedly to God, offering herself as a victim of immolation for his interests. My dear sisters, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us this simplicity. Draw down his grace into your hearts by great detachment from self and from all created things.

There are souls who have only simplicity of mind, which is far from being complete unless it is accompanied by simplicity of heart. For example: a sister, after having been corrected for something, goes to meditation where she begins to think that someone has given the superior an exaggerated account of her fault, but then makes up her mind not to excuse herself as that is the more perfect thing to do. This shows simplicity of mind which sees things as they are. But when this manner of acting is suggested to the heart, it is not accepted, and the first opportunity for overcoming self which God sends to that soul is neglected, and she finds excuses for her fault. You can see for yourselves, that a sister who only accepts humiliations when she thinks of them in times of prayer, has only simplicity of mind, and that very fact renders her more guilty in God's sight than another who has not seen things so clearly.

Simplicity of mind springs from a light God gives us by which we clearly see where duty and perfection lie. If we lack courage to overcome our repugnance, and put into practice what God has shown us by the light of his grace, then we are proportionately the more guilty in his sight.

17. Simplicity leads to unselfishness

A simple soul is in a state of spiritual childhood. She is meek, straightforward, and perfectly candid in all she does; always at peace and filled with an interior joy of which no one can deprive her. A simple soul loves silence and solitude, she delights in a life hidden in God, feels disgust for anything which does not lead to God, and quickly tires of being with people of the world. She is not curious and has no interests for anything except what concerns God's honour and glory. She never busies herself with her neighbour's faults: if these are brought to her notice, she tries to excuse them, turning everything to her own profit.

A simple soul lives on good terms with everyone. She understands how to overcome self even to the point of sympathising with disagreeable people or those hard to please. All her dealings with others are conducted on the supernatural plane. Again, the simple soul is perfectly submissive to her superiors. She shows them such respect and veneration that it is easy to see that her filial relations with them spring from the depths of her heart before they express themselves in her exterior behaviour; she always sees God in those set over her.

18. Simplicity makes a soul zealous

In our Institute, if we want to procure great glory to God, imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, live holy lives and pass happy and peaceful days in religion, we must be both "wise as serpents and simple as doves" (Matt.10:16). Possessed of these virtues, we shall be true Sisters of Notre Dame, shed around us the good odour of Jesus Christ, gain great victories over self, and by making our holy Institute flourish, attain the noble end it has in view.

We shall secure glorious triumphs for our Lord by snatching from Satan's clutches the poor victims he is about to drag down to hell, through instructing them in everything necessary for salvation. See here the only things after which a Sister of Notre Dame should hunger and thirst:

"the salvation of souls, of all the souls in the world".

Only simple souls are pleasing to God, for they all are fit instruments in his hands to promote his greater glory and the salvation of souls.

19. Simplicity increases the spirit of Faith

A simple soul lives not for self but for God. She does not know what is meant by seeking the esteem of creatures. Such a soul is recognised by her speech; she is never awkward or shy because she talks quite simply, not trying to appear learned. The good God loves and blesses a soul like this, and because she trusts him, he inspires her words according to his promise: "When they shall bring you before magistrates and powers, be not solicitous about how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say. For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that hour what to say" (Luke 12:11, 12).

When we arrange what we shall say and prepare answers beforehand to this or that, we act contrary to the spirit of simplicity, and the good God, wishing to show us what we are when left to ourselves, withholds his help when some difficulty occurs. A simple soul knows nothing and is never anxious. She goes forward like Abraham, ignorant of where God is leading her. Tell such a one she is black when she is white and she will believe it, for she sees not through her own eyes, but with the eyes of faith, that is to say, through the eyes of her superiors who, for her, represent God.

If we could see souls, we should never see any soul more beautiful than one at prayer. She talks to God with a sweet familiarity as to her father and spouse, without seeking learned phrases; simplicity is far removed from such subtleties; she humbles herself before God and adores him, frankly acknowledging her faults and asking his forgiveness. Then she listens to our Lord for he communicates himself to simple souls, revealing his secrets, and speaking to them of his father's glory and his love of souls. He asks them to become victims, to place themselves between his justice and poor sinners whom he must chastise. God can no more keep his secrets from a simple soul than he could hide from Abraham what he was about to do with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18:16-33). Then the soul begs God for grace. She dares to ask for all she needs, because she confides in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, her trust is boundless. She is a child who well knows that her father loves her, and that he is all powerful and all good; a spouse who has a right over the heart of her beloved, who can and who will satisfy her desires. A simple soul's holy familiarity with God diminishes neither her respect and admiration, nor her filial fear; on the contrary none fears more to sadden the heart of our divine master than the simple soul who enjoys close union with God.

20. Simplicity brings familiarity with God

Simplicity is the daughter of humility. It is easy for the simple soul to draw near to God, for she goes straight to him in her prayer, and God, on his side, loves to converse with one who is as candid and simple as a child. This wonderful virtue is so pleasing to God that he communicates himself in a special way to those who practise it, and fills them with light and grace.

A simple soul who loves and seeks her own abjection, never excuses herself nor tries minimising her faults. Simplicity is almost an unknown virtue, rarely put into practice for it cannot exist except in souls whose self-love and judgement have been destroyed. A simple soul never argues. If she is unjustly accused, she rejoices in having something to suffer, for this makes her more like her divine master. Such a soul is gentle and affectionate, considerate towards everyone. She easily draws

near to God who is simple being, and he gives her light to understand the mystery of the folly of the cross.

In a soul in whom simplicity of mind and heart are united, there is great purity, steadfast love of truth, deep humility, unfailing docility and a charming childlike spirit; all this renders her God's favoured child, and she delights his divine heart because the Holy Spirit, finding her docile to the inspirations of grace, teaches her what to do and what to avoid. Let us be simple, my dear sisters, and we shall soon taste the joys and advantages that tranquil simplicity brings. The devil will lose all power over us, for he can only build his empire on the two defects contrary to simplicity, pride and hypocrisy. Let us avoid all insincerity, shunning the least suspicion of double-dealing, and we shall soon obtain that simplicity which renders those who practise it pleasing to God. Let us be "prudent as serpents and simple as doves" (Matt.10:16). Where these virtues are lacking, deceit and cunning will be found. Prudence is necessary, but simplicity still more so, for St. Francis de Sales used to say that an ounce of Simplicity is worth a hundred pounds of prudence.

21. **Simplicity helps obedience**

Anyone who has the spirit of simplicity stifles all temptation to argue about what is imposed by obedience, accepting all that comes with good will. But when a soul lacks simplicity she pictures to herself all the difficulties involved in what has been enjoined, so that her heart soon rebels and there is risk of a serious fall. Simplicity of heart would brush aside whatever is painful in the order given and confiding wholly in God would submit at once, without stopping to ask 'why', 'how', 'but' and 'if'.

"What!", a good Sister of Notre Dame would exclaim: "what! shall I prefer my own judgement to that of God, acting through my superiors? A thousand times no, for then I should have against me that sentence of holy scripture: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov.28:26). None among us would like to be under the guidance of a fool, above all in so important a matter as that of our spiritual perfection. Since our eternity depends upon it let us renounce, once and for all, our own ideas and lights, and allow ourselves to be guided as do the blind.

The quickest way to become perfect in simplicity is to love the good God very much, because the love of God makes us seek what pleases him most, always ready to sacrifice our natural inclinations, and incapable of striving to win the esteem of creatures. Love gives confidence: and confidence is at once humble and strong. A trustful soul is not astonished when she does wrong, whereas a proud soul is discouraged. Humble trust in God makes use of faults as stepping-stones to higher perfection and greater love.

Simplicity brings with it peace, serenity and inexpressible stillness of soul. Further, a soul makes more progress in a month by the way of simplicity, than she would in a year, or even a lifetime by any other road if, indeed, there is any other way which leads to God. The way of simplicity is a short cut to heaven along which we travel in a carriage and pair, we must therefore say of simplicity, should we come to possess it, what Solomon said of wisdom: "All good things came together with her" (Wis.7:2).

22. **Simplicity seeks God alone**

St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, possessed true and holy simplicity, because he sought only "the greater glory of God". For himself his only desire was that the world should forget and despise him. These same things a good Sister of Notre Dame should desire and seek, for the

good God will unite her to himself and take his delight in her when he finds her heart empty of creatures and of self, for God is a jealous God and he will not have a divided heart. Is it possible that we, mere nothings as we are, can hesitate to sacrifice ourselves wholly to God. This comes from the little love we have for God, since nothing is hard to one who truly loves. If we love we shall be simple, for love is concerned only with the beloved, therefore we should be occupied with God alone.

No matter what happens to a simple soul she is never upset; a fault of frailty escapes her; she is not astonished, knowing well the depths of God's grace. She goes to God as to a loving Father, asks his forgiveness for letting go, though but for a moment, the hand he always holds out to her; then clings to it again more closely, more lovingly and more faithfully than before. Neither is she astonished if sorrow or suffering overtakes her. Having offered herself to God in fullest self-surrender, she is happy that God has accepted her oblation, and kisses the divine hand that strikes her. Such a soul as this constantly glorifies God, promotes his interests, and becomes his instrument for the saving of many souls.

23. Some results of Simplicity

A simple soul seeks God alone, having no fear of the mockery or laughter of the world because she is humble and seeks after what the world dreads. She desires to imitate Jesus Christ crucified, and by following his example to expiate the sins of men, and cleanse herself yet more from her own.

A simple soul is as pleased to be in desolation as in consolation, because her entire submission to the holy and adorable will of God enables her to accept lovingly and gratefully all that her heavenly Father sends, and she loves, adores, and kisses the hand that strikes. Worldly people dislike a simple soul because she never conforms to the maxims of the world, since the single eye of faith exposes its hollowness to the light of day and despises it. Similarly the world is distasteful to a simple soul because it is full of vice and corruption and totally opposed to the spirit of the gospel.

Worldly people seek honour, pleasure, good cheer and all that flatters pride and sensuality. Our Lord condemned these things which drag men down to the level of brute beasts and often lead to dishonest practices. The simple soul, on the other hand, runs eagerly after humiliations, retirement delights her, and she finds pleasure in practising mortification. Her greatest happiness is to be little and abject in the eyes of others, and to live "hidden with Christ in God" (Gal.2:20), avoiding the least thought which might come between herself and God.

This contrast between worldly and simple souls explains the words of our Lord: "No one can serve two masters" (Luke 15:13). God and the world. Good Sisters of Notre Dame are as averse from the world as the world is from them. But though we do not love the world, we should love the souls of those who live in the world, because they are bought by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who allowed his sacred heart to be pierced, and willed that it should always remain open in order that everyone might enter there. It is the sublime vocation of a Sister of Notre Dame to gather moment by moment the precious blood of Jesus and to apply it to souls, that in his adorable heart they may be purified by this divine blood.

24. Simplicity and the presence of God

The most efficacious means of acquiring true simplicity is to strive to live in the holy presence of God. By fidelity to this practice we obtain great purity of heart and simplify our whole conduct both interiorly and exteriorly. The Holy Spirit watches over a soul who keeps herself attentive to

God's presence, and aware of her least movement, he enlightens, guides and consoles her, moderating her eagerness and encouraging her in the work of attaining perfection. A soul who lives thus in God's presence is never disheartened; whatever happens she never yields to discouragement, for she never forgets that God sees her, hears her sighs, watches over her and blesses her. This faith in God's presence makes the soul go forward with humble submission, virile courage and genuine simplicity.

25. Simplicity helps our relations with superiors

Simplicity makes a sister so humble, lowly and deferential towards her superiors, and even towards her fellow sisters, that she obeys at once and does all she is told without examining the order given or making the least representation about it. Another sister, devoid of simplicity, acts a double part. She questions what she has to do, examines it, grumbles about it, sometimes even going so far as to rebel against authority in her heart, while accomplishing exteriorly and mechanically what obedience has prescribed. A soul with this spirit is good for nothing and will never make a good Sister of Notre Dame, since for that she must allow herself to be fashioned with perfect simplicity. In a good religious the simplicity of childhood is united to the wisdom of old age, because God himself keeps from human imprudence a soul who has surrendered herself entirely to him, and to her superiors for love of him. It was divine prudence such as this which made St. Maurus walk upon the water, and rendered a ferocious lion submissive to his touch. Had he listened to human prudence he would not have obeyed, but because he went forward simply at the bidding of his superior, God enveloped him with the marvels of his divine prudence.

Through her spirit of simplicity a soul becomes the cherished daughter of God the Father, the beloved spouse of God the Son, and the dear delight of God the Holy Spirit. Without simplicity no religious enjoys these privileges, but appears before the Blessed Trinity like a beggar clothed in rags - the tatters of self-love and self-opinionatedness and stained with the spirit of hypocrisy.

O blessed simplicity of mind and heart, which destroys self-judgement, has no personal desires and no self-will, what lasting and celestial happiness do you not bring to the soul!

26. Simplicity, humility and truth

Simplicity, humility and truth are one and the same thing. Simplicity makes us recognise that we have nothing which merits praise from men. Truth shows some souls that they are endowed beyond others with certain talents and a keen intellect, or that they practise certain virtues, but this same truth also enables them to realise that all these things are a free gift from the liberality of God, who lends these talents not for themselves, but to render them capable of promoting his glory, and of using his gifts in the service of souls. Humility prevents them from priding themselves on these gifts. It urges such souls rather to abase themselves the more before God, lest they should waste the five talents entrusted to them by their divine master. A really simple Sister of Notre Dame is not always saying "I cannot do this, I am not able to do that". To act thus would simply imply reliance of herself. But, turning to her heavenly father, she says: "My God, our mother asked me to do such-a-thing. You will, surely, give me all I need in order to accomplish this work, since it is thy will that I should obey". Then, strong in faith, obedience and trust, she goes forward, quite simply. If God should work miracles through her she would not be astonished, because he has promised everything to blind and simple obedience. Thus it is that humility and truth are one with true simplicity.

A simple soul loves everyone in God, not attaching herself to one rather than to another on account

of personal qualities. She knows that all that is good and lovable in creatures comes from God, who is infinite and immutable perfection. This she realises for herself and teaches to others. Hence her admiration and esteem for others passes on to God to whom alone she attributes the traits of perfection, the tiny rays of glory which he vouchsafes to let shine in the souls of his creatures. Humility pursued by truth judges itself unworthy of anyone's consideration, because truth, which is immutable, makes the soul see and understand that man dishonoured his noble origin by sin and that he would have remained in that state of degradation had not the Son of God become a victim to redeem, purify and ennoble him, restoring to him the right to enter heaven.

Ah! my good sisters, how necessary is true and humble simplicity if we are to fulfil the obligations of our holy vocation! One of the great means of acquiring this rare virtue of simplicity is unreserved openness of heart with our superiors. If we hide what ought to be made known, God will hide himself from us, that is to say, we shall neither see him nor feel his presence as a simple soul sees and feels him everywhere. He will hide himself from us, and we shall make many mistakes.

Do not be afraid of opening your heart. There must be no excuses, no minimising of our faults, no dread of losing the good opinion of our superiors. All that is much too petty for a Sister of Notre Dame, and unworthy of a soul who ought to be entirely devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

A simple soul does great things for God because she lets herself be chiselled and fashioned for accomplishing the great work to which the heart of Jesus calls her. She loves the axe and plane which cut away from all that is not according to God. She is brave in time of trial and victorious in her struggle to attain virtue because she works beneath the eye of God and in union with her superior who can act freely with her. Thus by complete death to self and the surrender of her whole being into the hands of her superiors, she casts herself into a mould, as it were, where she is fashioned to the virtues necessary to a good Sister of Notre Dame, namely a perfect and apostolic religious.

Simplicity is neither brusque nor timid. Just as a simple soul flees the company of those who only importune her with worldly and distracting topics, so will she lend herself simply and cheerfully when God, by the choice of her superiors, calls upon her to quit this solitude to entertain visitors from outside, the parents of pupils, or others. A good all-round simplicity, with its source in the spirit of God within her, teaches such a soul to make herself 'all to all' to gain all for Jesus Christ, as did St. Paul.

The greatest need of a Sister of Notre Dame is precisely this spirit of simplicity combined with lofty and generous ideals and a large and magnanimous heart. There must be no petty souls in our Institute, none who are over-timid and take fright at a mere nothing. No, no, we need simple souls, souls above all this, who give no thought to anything that is not God, because they lean entirely on him, acting only in and for him, for in God there can be nothing petty or timorous.

The good God works his will "sweetly and strongly" (Wis.8:1) and is truly simple. I have already told you that those who are not simple are neither God's children, nor mine.

III : THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE

1. What is meant by blind obedience

The characteristic virtue of a Sister of Notre Dame ought to be obedience - blind obedience, springing from faith. Ah, my good daughters, if you are not, above all, children of obedience, you will neither be God's children, nor mine. A Sister of Notre Dame must be recognised by her spirit of obedience.

Blind obedience means that we must have no eyes of our own, that is to say, once our superiors have spoken, we must never oppose their wishes by any kind of reasoning, exteriorly or interiorly. This implies the constant putting to death of our own judgement which is always ready to rebel at the least contradiction, and the stifling of even the least suggestion of self-love. Simplicity of heart is the great means of acquiring that blind obedience which has made so many religious holy, and which alone makes holy Sisters of Notre Dame. It is this kind of obedience which makes us love our own abjection, and enables us to perform blindly all that is enjoined without opposing comment or question. This is rendered possible by the intimate conviction blind obedience gives that God speaks to us through the voice of our superiors, and that the good God cannot deceive anyone. Moreover, a simple soul is so convinced of her own incapacity that she will not allow herself to discuss any order she receives. Such is the perfect obedience every Sister of Notre Dame must strive to attain.

2. The merit of obedience

No soul on earth is more at peace or happier than a Sister of Notre Dame who is perfectly obedient. Such a soul loves the subjection of religious life and allows herself to be guided in everything by her superiors after the manner of a little child, who lets its mother do what she likes with it, never asking why she takes it here or there, or why such and such a thing is done. Oh, what radiant peace accompanies a docile spirit and submissive heart. Blind obedience is the seal which attests the holiness of a religious.

My good daughters, even if you should work miracles, you have nothing, and are nothing, unless you are perfectly obedient. This lovable virtue alone gives all its merit to the religious life. The measure of our obedience is the measure of the good we do to souls. Without obedience our life would be barren of fruit, even should we work ourselves to death.

The good God accepts from his spouses and especially from Sisters of Notre Dame, only work undertaken through obedience - all the rest is nothing. A straw picked up through obedience is of greater merit in the eyes of God than taking the discipline to blood merely to satisfy self-will.

The great advantage of a religious who practises perfect obedience is that when she stands before the judgement seat of God, all her works will be found good. If the good God asks her: "Why did you do such-and-such a thing?" she will be able to reply in these golden words: "Lord, I have done thy holy will, because I did that of my superiors".

3. The necessity of obedience

It is quite impossible to be a good religious, or a true Sister of Notre Dame, unless we practice obedience. Nothing can be done with a soul who is not submissive, who only obeys by constraint, exteriorly, and when the command pleases her. Though endowed with all kinds of talent, a person such as this will do no good at all in our holy Institute. On the other hand, a person with few exterior gifts, without learning or talent, may do great things for the glory of God and work wonders with souls if she is perfectly submissive to all the will of God demands of her, and perfectly obedient to her superiors.

This is because the good God takes pleasure in pouring out the treasures of his grace upon souls that are docile and humble, and because he never disappoints those who, expecting nothing from their own efforts, hope for everything from him.

Let us make no mistake, the good God will do great things through our little Institute if he finds there souls anchored in obedience springing from faith, and lowly in their own eyes. But, if he sees among us souls who are self-sufficient, and self-reliant, who have always something to say about what their superiors ordain, he will destroy the whole Institute from top to bottom.

O my dear daughters, let us be very little, very docile under the hand of the good God - esteeming ourselves nothing in his sight. And he, the good God, who is creator of all things, will do great things for his glory with these bits of nothingness. The more we realise that we are nothing, the more will the good God be glorified in us and through us.

4. **We must imitate our Lord's obedience**

My dear sisters, the life of a Sister of Notre Dame represents, better than any other, that which our divine saviour led upon earth. The gospels lay particular stress on the obedience of our blessed Lord.

There was, first of all, his perfect dependence on his heavenly father and even on the blessed virgin, for he waited for her consent before taking flesh in the virginal womb.

Then the evangelist sums up thirty years of our Lord's life in the words: "He was subject to them" (Luke 2:51). Further on, the gospel shows us Jesus Christ obedient even to his death upon the cross.

In like manner, anyone whom God calls to our holy Institute, must from the first moment of her entrance into religion, do nothing, desire nothing even, but what her superiors wish. From the very first hour of her coming amongst us, she must lovingly embrace the holy dependence of life in religion, and continue her obedience until she breathes her last sigh.

A Sister of Notre Dame often meets with hard trials, my dear sisters, for without contradictions, humiliations and sufferings, no sanctity is possible. We ought to hope that God, in his goodness, has chosen from amongst us souls whom he can make saints - great and generous-hearted souls, martyrs of love.

Of souls such as these the good God will perhaps ask, as they tread the path of obedience, their hands and feet, that he may pierce them, as their divine exemplar was pierced by the nails which fastened him to the cross. If the good God offers you this grace, do not refuse him, my good daughters. Offer him without a word, your hands and your feet, and, if need be, your heart also. No martyrdom is more glorious than the martyrdom of obedience. It is a sure sign that the good God loves a soul very much when He calls her to be a martyrs of holy obedience.

5. **The fruits of obedience**

A Sister of Notre Dame who possesses the spirit of her Institute is simple in mind and heart, and from this simplicity springs a habit of blind obedience. Hence this soul is guided only by the eye of faith. She sees the good God in all that obedience prescribes, lives always in the holy presence of

God, and, under the eye of her divine master, devotes herself to that from which human nature shrinks. Nothing is too difficult once obedience has spoken, and in this way she gains many a victory over herself.

An obedient soul finds union with our Lord easy. During her time of prayer, she talks to God about all she has to do, telling him earnestly that, with the help of his grace, she is going to practise the virtues of which he gave us an example, but especially the heroism and simplicity of his obedience.

A Sister of Notre Dame who is perfectly obedient is truly a soul of prayer. Throughout the whole community she spreads a delicious perfume - "the good odour of Jesus Christ", her divine spouse. Her spirit of perfect submission is a joy to her superiors. Being a stranger to that hidden viper called secret pride, a refined species of self-love which damages the soul as rust does iron, her happiness is pure and unalloyed.

6. Obedience and self-denial

Anyone who withdraws herself from obedience, withdraws herself at the same time from grace. A Sister of Notre Dame who does not submit willingly and without a murmur to the wishes of her superior, shows plainly that she is hardly dead to self, and has but little understanding of the sublime end of her vocation.

A religious, living thus a life of self-will who follows her own judgement in everything, gives the devil an easy hold upon her, and she will not be long without incurring a serious fall. On the other hand, an obedient soul, who, in the spirit of faith, sacrifices her own way of acting and thinking, will become, in a short time, the object of divine predilection, and will advance very quickly in holiness.

To become truly obedient, unrelaxing effort is necessary to subdue our own judgement, by refusing it any afterthought on the orders of superiors, in order that our will may become one and the same with theirs.

7. Obedience, a safe path to heaven

An obedient soul will never go to hell. It is only by holy obedience that a religious can really offer herself as a holocaust to God, for obedience alone immolates our inmost being, that is, our own will and judgement. By the practice of blind obedience we renounce the dearest of all human possessions. Blind obedience, too, enables us to give more glory to God, for the smallest things done by obedience become means for the exercise of the highest virtue.

Suppose, my dear sisters, that your superior told you to go into the garden and plant cabbages upside down. If you obey without murmur or criticism, conforming your will and judgement to the will and judgement of your superior, you would thereby give more glory to God than if you raised the dead to life. Furthermore, by this simple act of obedience you would advance a great deal in perfection and procure more glory to God than if, through self-will you converted a whole town. An obedient soul shall sing of victory during this life, and at death she will carry off the victorious crown. A Sister of Notre Dame, deep rooted in obedience, will go straight to heaven. For perfect obedience implies perfect humility, simplicity and love of God - hence heaven is open to those who obey blindly.

8. The great advantage of obedience

My dear sisters, one of the great advantages of religious life is the practice of obedience by which

the soul completely abdicates self-will in order to commit its entire life into the hands of its superiors who hold the place of God. This virtue shields us from the snares of the devil, and gives us the most consoling assurance we can have here below, namely that we are carrying out the will of God. But, in order to obtain this assurance, blind obedience is necessary. To be only half obedient is unworthy of a Sister of Notre Dame. Our obedience must be entire, virile, and great hearted; knowing no hesitation, not even considering representation, but sacrificing alike without human respect, will, judgement and heart.

Whatever obedience prescribes must be loved because obedience comes from God, and under whatever form God comes to us he ought to be loved. Ah, my dear sisters, how sweet a captivity is that of holy obedience. Let us allow ourselves to be bound by its fetters, yielding ourselves blindfold to its demands. Then indeed, we should enjoy perfect peace, because we should advance freely according to our vocation, swimming, as it were, in the holy and adorable will of God.

9. Obedience essential to a Sister of Notre Dame

In choosing what virtues to practise, we must lay stress on those best suited to the duties of our state. Now for us, Sisters of Notre Dame, the most needful virtue and the one we ought to strive after most, concentrating all our efforts upon it, is the holy obedience. Even though we possessed all other virtues in an heroic degree, they would have no merit before God if obedience were lacking. All our endeavour must be to attain perfect obedience. Rigorous austerities were the chosen pursuit of St. Paula, who said they were a source of spiritual consolation to her; but her obedience on this point was not sufficiently perfect, and St. Jerome declares that inasmuch as she carried her abstinence to extremes, against the advice of her bishop, she was blameworthy. That proves that an action meritorious in itself is worth nothing before God unless it is the outcome of obedience.

Obedience is the mother-virtue, the basis of all solid perfection. It is impossible to be deluded so long as we follow the path traced out by our superiors. True obedience should find us ready for anything, everywhere and always; to leave some work unfinished, to change our charge or house, ready to live and ready to die. The good God reigns as absolute master in an obedient heart. Obedience entails self-denial, continual death to self. It means destroying self that God alone may reign within us.

My dear sisters, do not bargain about obedience; Sisters of Notre Dame ought no longer to belong to themselves, hence they should let themselves be made use of, accepting all their superior ordains, even should it be contrary to common sense. The spirit of obedience is the nerve which supports the Institute and God will work miracles for obedient souls. May it please our Lord, my dear sisters, to give us all the grace necessary to transform ourselves according to obedience.

10. Obedience makes us detached

The surest means of acquiring the perfection of obedience in a short time is to strive to become indifferent, that is to say, to desire nothing and be afraid of nothing. Holy indifference presupposes deep humility, great self-denial, habitual mortification of the senses, and especially real detachment from one's own judgement, personal view and tastes. These are important virtues, but a Sister of Notre Dame must work on large lines; where virtue is concerned, nothing petty is proper to our Institute which needs souls of more than common stature.

From the moment when a Sister of Notre Dame binds herself to God by her religious profession,

she must be indifferent to all the arrangements of obedience in her regard, no matter in what manner she is employed, she knows that she is doing God's will, and consequently what is useful for his glory and the good of souls. That ought to be enough; God: nothing else matters. Today at the head, tomorrow at the bottom; today looked up to by everyone, tomorrow in complete oblivion and abjection. What matter! A Sister of Notre Dame ought to be happy in the former state and still happier in the latter.

By lowly dispositions of perfect indifference a Sister of Notre Dame obtains the gift of humility, but this indifference must be interior. In the depths of her heart she must surrender herself completely, accepting everything, or quitting everything at the word of obedience. Without this interior submission there can be no true Sister of Notre Dame, because without it there can be no real sacrifice of self, no immolation of soul. We must always have the axe in hand ready to uproot the sprouts of self-love, or its stronger growth. When a sister is ashamed, disturbed and discouraged on meeting with a slight humiliation of even with a great one, she is no Sister of Notre Dame, for a Sister of Notre Dame ought to run after crosses, humiliations and contempt, because these detach her from herself and from creatures to throw her wholly upon God. A person who is deeply humiliated and shamed turns wholly to God, trusts only in him, and never forsakes him. But to attain this, self-love must be trampled upon. My dear sisters, can we dare to call ourselves Sisters of Notre Dame if we listen to self-love, for we know that self-love separates us from God. Where self reigns, love of God is extinguished, for the latter cannot live in partnership with this enemy of God's glory. Oh! it is a great privilege to be a Sister of Notre Dame. A Sister of Notre Dame lives, breathes, and must die only for the greater glory of God, of our good God.

IV : ON OUR BLESSED LADY

1. Mary, our model of humility

The blessed virgin is the protectress and model of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Could we doubt of our loving immaculate mother's care for every member of our holy Institute, after seeing how well she protected us when so many others were in distress? (5) How could a Sister of Notre Dame, who knows whence she draws her title, not have unbounded trust in so good a mother, after receiving so great a mark of Mary's love? Would she not be more than ever aflame with zeal to honour our Lady and cause her to be honoured by others? But, if we content ourselves with merely honouring the blessed virgin, without trying to imitate her, we make a great mistake. We must try to be like her, particularly in her humility, obedience and charity. Mary was the most privileged of all God's creatures, and at the same time the humblest. Unless she had been humble she would not have drawn down upon herself the regard of God the Father, she herself declares this in her Magnificat: "He hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid" (Luke 1:48).

Although our Lady was chosen to be the Mother of God, she never lost sight of her lowliness; "It was necessary", says St. Bernard, "that the humility of the Mother should precede the humility of her divine Son. What an example is there here, Sisters of Notre Dame. We ought to be humbled to the dust at the thought of being employed in a work so great as that of helping to save souls, for the measure of our humility is the measure of the glory that we shall render to God, and also of the good we shall do for souls. Sisters of Notre Dame must also imitate our Lady by an obedience, blind and prompt and entire like that of their heavenly mother in the mystery of her Purification, when she obeyed a law from which she was exempt, since she was at once Virgin and Mother.

We must also be like her in the practice of holy charity. Love is never better proved than by full and

utter conformity to the holy and adorable will of God, that God who is the object of our love. It was particularly at the foot of the cross that our blessed Lady showed that her will was perfectly united to that of her heavenly Father.

2. Obligation of imitating Mary's virtues

We, who are the beloved daughters of our blessed Lady, who are her sisters - since we bear the name Sisters of Notre Dame - we must not rest content with boasting of these prerogatives, but must work to become like her to acquire a true and holy likeness to our loving mother, and this because we are members of an Institute which belongs to her in quite a special way. It is her own Institute.

Like the blessed virgin, we must build our spiritual edifice on a strong foundation of humility. To do this will be truly imitating our dear lady, who at the age of three consecrated her virginity to God, when to remain a virgin was regarded as a reproach. We, too, must not shrink from being humiliated, from appearing little, from being held of no account in the eyes of men. To be such is, indeed the true greatness of a Sister of Notre Dame, who ought to glory only in her nothingness. If she does not do this, the building of her spiritual life will crumble to nothing, because our blessed Lady only helps and protects those who honour her by imitating her virtues.

Unless piety goes hand in hand with real effort to acquire virtue, it is nothing but a delusion and often leads to the loss of salvation.

3. Sisters of Notre Dame share Mary's works as co-redemptrix

Our Lady's greatest suffering was at the foot of the cross when she saw the precious and adorable blood of her Son and God flowing down upon her, and reddening the hill top of Calvary. It is on Calvary that Sisters of Notre Dame must become steeped in that courageous zeal which braves all difficulties in order to devote itself to the salvation of souls, so that the suffering of our Lord and the sorrows of his blessed mother may not have been borne in vain.

We ought to beg of our dear Lady, who must reverently have gathered up the precious blood of her divine Son, to apply it to the souls confided to our care. We should in particular, imitate that deep love which made Mary willing to bear this suffering for the ransom of the human race, which, in union with her divine Son, she wished to save. In the same way, we too should esteem ourselves happy to suffer, for we too are called to cooperate in the sublime work of the Redemption. But for this we must have brave, generous hearts. God never leaves a fervent Sister of Notre Dame without some cross either interior or exterior. This is because without the cross hardly anything can be done for God.

4. The company of Mary

In order to let the spirit of our holy Institute penetrate deeply into our souls, and to become perfect in its practice, we need only examine thoughtfully whence it originated. Consider that as the 'Company of Jesus' founded by St. Ignatius means 'association with Jesus', it follows that of a Jesuit it ought to be possible to say that he has the spirit of Jesus, the virtue of Jesus, the strength and power of Jesus. In the same way the Sisters of Notre Dame are the 'Company of Mary'. Hence in each one ought to be found the spirit of Mary, the virtue of Mary, the strength and power of Mary. That wonderful grace given to our Institute by the sacred heart of Jesus, through the hands of Mary Immaculate show us that God intends to make us 'The Company of Mary', that is to say, true Sisters

of Our Lady'

All the trials that have beset the beginnings of our Institute up to this present time (1814 or 1815) ought to convince us that it is the work of God. These thoughts will easily show us how the good God has bestowed a special grace upon us, in deigning to call us to so sublime a vocation, and to teach us how great are our obligations.

Let us show our gratitude by accomplishing perfectly all our duties towards the good God, towards our superiors and sisters, and afterwards towards others; for the perfect accomplishment of all these duties, we need nothing less than the infinite strength, power and love of God, our Saviour, who deigns to subject to himself the minds and hearts of his own creatures, notwithstanding our misery, ignorance, weakness and ingratitude, in order to associate us with himself in the great work of saving souls.

With the help of our dear Lady we will follow our blessed Saviour in the company of Mary; with her we shall be strong because we shall be lowly and trustful.

If we considered for a moment who God is, what is his power, his holiness, his love, his infinite perfections, we should be abased and confounded that so great a God has deigned to attach us inviolably to himself, to be among his closest followers.

Let us value our vocation and our happiness above all the goods and pleasures of this world, which have no real value at all, and cannot be compared with those God has deigned in his love to bestow upon us; let us beg our blessed Lady to give us a share in her spirit, strength and power, that we may all become good Sisters of Notre Dame.

5. Our claim on our Lady

If all Christians ought to have confidence in the blessed virgin, much more can Sisters of Notre Dame say to Mary with filial love and trust: "Show thyself a Mother". Her heart is ever open to us. There this loving mother stores for us, her daughters, all the graces necessary for our holy vocation, because we are wholly devoted and consecrated to her.

She herself inspired the thought that she would deign to protect our Institute in a quite special way, and that she wished us to belong wholly to her. That is why our Lady inspired our foundresses to call themselves 'Sisters of Our Lady' and to bring into being an Institute which should be her own privileged family at a time of suffering and desolation, when almost every nation is in a distracted state.

We should be very ungrateful to God and to our blessed Lady, if we were not penetrated to the very depths of our soul with deepest thankfulness and if we were not entirely faithful in working to become good Sisters of Notre Dame.

6. Our Lady and the Holy Eucharist

When we go to holy communion we should ask our blessed Lady to deign to prepare us herself to receive her divine Son into our hearts.

It is said, by St. Augustine, that the blessed virgin conceived our divine Lord in her heart before he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in her chaste womb, and that it was this which gained for her the wonderful grace of being chosen for the exalted dignity of the Mother of God.

We must beg our Lady to teach us how our divine Lord may become, as it were, incarnate in our hearts and minds, by our good conduct and earnest desires, before we present ourselves to receive him in holy communion. We, who are chosen to be Sisters of Our Lady and spouses of Jesus Christ, must, after the example of our heavenly mother, make Jesus live in us; we must espouse ourselves to him in mind and heart by sacrificing to him all we hold dearest in the world, should it not help us to draw near to the good God, and to him alone.

The best disposition for accomplishing this is to be humble. It was humility which made our blessed Lady who, because she was conceived immaculate was not subject to any of our human frailties, always acknowledge her lowliness before God, not attributing this great privilege in any way to herself but abasing herself before God. Yet, though Mary was without sin, she understands all our weaknesses and little miseries, and her heart is, for this very reason, all the more compassionate and prompt to help us in our troubles. She assists us when we fail, just because she is so pure, so strong, and so full of God.

V : ON THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

1. The necessity of prayer

To draw fruit from prayer, we must go to meditation with a real desire to profit by it, run to it as eagerly as a thirsty stag seeks springs of running water. If a sister only goes to meditation because it is the hour fixed for it, or because if she does not go others will think her relaxed in God's service, these dispositions would be extremely dangerous. It would be better not to go at all; for to act like a hypocrite is to tempt God. If anyone cares little about meditation, it is for want of due reflection. If the eye of faith is open when we go to chapel, we shall feel that we are where God is waiting for us, where he gazes into our soul, and offers us his hands full of gifts and graces, while his heart is open to receive us. What a favour! A God who begs us to receive his divine bounty. Let us also remember that in chapel we shall find ourselves amid the angels who surround our Lord in the tabernacle, and who await our prayers to carry them to God, from whom they bring back what we have asked for.

Rodriguez says that during the time of prayer the angels of God are, as it were, upon a ladder which they continually ascend and descend. Alas! it is easy to say that it is enough to go to meditation to be tormented by thoughts of one's charge, etc. But that is a vain excuse, for those who discharge their office well also make their meditation well; the one helps the other, and our Lord lets himself be found easily by those who all day long have sought him in their work. That is to say, when a sister has spoken and acted for him alone, striving to promote his glory and to assist in saving souls. Sometimes we say we have nothing to meditate about, but this arises only from cowardice and sloth. Anyone who loves the good God and who has his glory and interests at heart, is not so dry as that when kneeling in his holy presence.

2. The fruit of mental prayer

Prayer is converse with God, which is very pleasing to him. Meditation is more agreeable to God than all vocal prayers, for when we say vocal prayers we cannot always be sure that our hearts feel all that our lips are uttering. Often enough, alas, we pronounce words which find no echo at all in our hearts. Meditation softens the heart of God, in our regard, and by it everything can be obtained. We have numberless examples of this in the Old Testament: when the Israelites had done wrong

and revolted against God, Moses at once put himself in prayer to appease the anger of the Lord, and always succeeded in winning the heart of God. My good daughters, prayer is the unconquerable weapon of all Sisters of Notre Dame. It is through prayer and in prayer that we make all the sacrifices God asks of us, there shall we find light, strength and especially love. In the same way a Sister of Notre Dame, who for one reason or another, dispenses herself from meditation, will make no progress in virtue; she will soon fall behind and end by losing her vocation altogether.

Everything goes to prove that mental prayer is necessary for the success of any work we may undertake. We often see that when we are asked to do or say something that seems difficult or even impossible. If we make our meditation well, everything seems changed and we find ourselves ready in order to please God to undertake anything that is proposed. Without mental prayer, there can be no true Sisters of Notre Dame.

3. Mental prayer, a source of progress

What is there more glorious for poor human mortals than to devote themselves to mental prayer, keeping themselves thereby closely united to God, and conversing familiarly with him? During the time of prayer the soul is humbly prostrate before the adorable majesty of God; the understanding is occupied in contemplating the infinite perfection of this great God, and the will is exercised in loving him.

The true means of making mental prayer well is to go to it with an upright heart and an ardent desire to abase oneself in God's holy presence, to destroy all our passions and imperfections, all, in a word, that is an obstacle to our spiritual growth and progress, in order that the reign of God may be established within us.

How happy we are thus to be able to give ourselves up to prayer. It is there that we drink of the spirit of God in its fulness; from that divine source we draw the graces necessary for corresponding well with our holy vocation and for saturating ourselves in the spirit of our holy Institute, a spirit which demands manly courage and a generous heart. My good sisters, it will be in vain for you to listen to instructions and to make good spiritual reading, if you do not devote yourselves to mental prayer. Without this, all the rest will bear no fruit for your perfection; it will be but sterile work, for it is only in prayer that God communicates himself to us, enlightens us and by the operation of his grace, effects within us a total reformation of heart and conduct.

4. Perseverance necessary to mental prayer

We are obliged to practise mental prayer and ought to go to it in a spirit of gratitude, however wearisome and distasteful it may be. Although mental prayer may be painful, it is always both indispensable and efficacious. Never let us grow lukewarm in prayer. Are we not well repaid for our trouble by the happiness it brings of conversing with God, and of remaining in his holy presence? Let us bless the good God in darkness, let us bless him in light; let us surrender ourselves utterly and entirely into his divine hands, so that he may do with us what he will. Let us be very sure that we shall never be in greater safety than when we have placed ourselves unreservedly in the hands and heart of our heavenly Father.

The fruit of mental prayer is the entire giving of ourselves to God, letting him do with us what he will, as he wills, and whensoever he wills to do it.

Mental prayer, and that alone, can teach us to live in God and for God.

5. The spirit of faith necessary for mental prayer

What is sometimes wanting to our prayer is the true spirit of faith. We do not realise sufficiently that it is God who invites us to converse with him, and that he gives us this invitation because he desires to enrich us with his gifts and graces.

This thought - that it is God who awaits us - ought to fill us with confusion. Like the publican in the gospel we ought, in thought at least, to stand at the door of the chapel in great humility, and there pray, beg and entreat for all we need, for the good God likes to be asked over and over again. He is a good Father, and only acts thus to try our faith. If God does not hear our prayer in a way we can perceive, let us go on praying all the same. A mother does not cease to love her children because she does not give them all they ask. But if a child begins to cry and calls her, she leaves whatever she is doing at once and flies to help it. In the same way the good God is more ready to forgive us than we are to ask his pardon. Like a loving Father he anticipates our needs by his grace and if we were faithful we should make great progress in virtue.

Prayer is specially necessary when some fault has escaped us, or when we have been in trouble. We go to our Lord weighed down by our burden and he purifies and uplifts us, for it is impossible that a change will not take place in our imperfect dispositions before we leave his presence.

6. Mental prayer leads to love

"Prayer is the chief exercise in the school of love". Yes, my good daughters, it is in prayer that the fire of love is enkindled, for it is said of St. Teresa that she was a victim of love because she was continually united to God by prayer.

Nevertheless, she was not always prostrate before the blessed sacrament, or at the foot of the crucifix in her cell. Oh no, she was always busy, but when through necessity, she conversed with men on business affairs, she, at the same time, held sweet interior converse with her divine spouse. It is a mistake if we think we cannot imitate St. Teresa. She was not just a simple religious, but had to lend herself to manifold exterior works, to the difficulties consequent upon new foundations. Nevertheless she was, through all this, given up to the practice of prayer. A Sister of Notre Dame must also give herself up to prayer in spite of the many and varied occupations with which her day is filled.

7. Consolation not necessary to true prayer

We must not be anxious when our prayer is dry and barren, but at such times endeavour, like good Sisters of Notre Dame, to prove our love more than ever by our work. Generally speaking, a meditation made with difficulty leaves us with our will strengthened and steadied, because we humble ourselves more than usual on that account and humility draws God into our hearts. Let us often meditate on the example set us by our blessed Lord. As soon as Jesus had ended his prayer in the garden of olives, although he had received no consolation from his heavenly Father, he went to seek his three disciples who were at the foot of the hill, and noticing that they were asleep he said to them sadly, "What! could you not watch one hour with me? Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation".

Our Lord obtained no comfort from his creatures. He willed to bear this abandonment by his disciples for our instruction. He went back to his prayer sadder still at heart, and the eternal Father

sent an angel to him to teach us that we ought not to seek consolation from creatures in our troubles, but that we ought to have recourse to God in prayer. Often the good God seems to have abandoned us, and nevertheless, though we do not know it, his love is bearing us up and inspiring us with true and solid devotion.

8. Humility necessary to prayer

We must present ourselves before God with a humble heart; this is an essential disposition for making our prayer well. Let us acknowledge our spiritual poverty and look upon ourselves as stripped of all merit. Let us prostrate ourselves in prayer, like poor beggars considering that all creatures here below are poor like ourselves, and seeing in God alone the treasury of all grace. Let us beg of him to open it in our favour. Temporal goods do not cause men to be lost; they are God's gifts which ought to be used with prudence; the curse upon them comes from the pride and forgetfulness of God which they may cause.

Neediness and poverty do not make saints; even people in great temporal misery may desire to be rich. Humility alone renders us pleasing in the sight of God. We read in the Old Testament that holy Job was rich in his possessions, but that he had nevertheless that spirit of poverty which is so pleasing to God, because his heart was not attached to temporal goods. Thus it is that there can be rich men who are at the same time humble, and persons observing religious poverty who are proud. Our Lord condemns pride. He cannot suffer a proud spirit, and turns his face away from her when she is in his holy temple, while he inclines his ear to the humble and delights in hearkening to her prayer. Humility is to the soul what wings are to a bird: without wings a bird cannot soar aloft into the sky; without humility a soul cannot raise itself towards God during the time of prayer, and we so greatly need to reach God through prayer, in order to appease his divine anger, and snatch from his hands the weapons of his justice.

9. Perseverance in aridity

There are some people who go gladly to meditation so long as they are inundated with consolation, but no sooner does God begin to hide himself, the divine sun of justice to veil the splendour of its shining so that their fidelity is put to the test, than they begin to neglect this holy exercise. Such souls show clearly that they seek themselves, for those who truly love God are as happy and faithful when they are tried by all sorts of temptations as when God sends them consolation, because they have nothing in view but the desire of pleasing their divine spouse. These good souls know well that God is a loving Father, and that if he treats them like this it is in order to test their fidelity and for their greater good. Far from being upset and discouraged, as souls given up to self-love would be, they redouble their efforts and rejoice at having something to bear for the love of God. That is how Sisters of Notre Dame must act. When they experience dryness and have many trials during their hour of prayer, they must redouble their generosity and remain as firm as rocks, spending their whole being in self-abasement before the majesty of God.

10. Mental prayer, a means of doing good to souls

Prayer is the sole means by which we can hope to do good to souls. It is during this holy time of union with our Lord that we learn to handle the arms necessary to success in the great and sublime work of education, a work which has for object the forming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the souls of children, teaching them to have a deep knowledge of God, and filling their souls with his spirit and doctrine.

If we are truly united to God, we shall be able to imprint in the hearts of our children a great horror of sin and a filial fear of God. These sentiments will be so deeply rooted in their hearts that they will remember these truths till the day of their death, thus assuring their salvation.

But if we are not souls of prayer, we shall gain the hearts of our children in appearance only. They will be good so long as they remain in our sight, but as soon as they leave our care, they will give up all they have been taught, our instructions will be but empty sounds striking their ears, all will be forgotten, and I ask you, dear sisters, whose fault will this be? It will be our fault, because we acted merely according to human views, and before the judgement seat of God we shall have to bear the whole responsibility of all the good we ought to have done and have not done, for want of the interior spirit, for want of earnest mental prayer. We cannot give what we have not got. If we are not filled with the good God we cannot let our fulness overflow to bring God into the hearts of those confided to our care.

It is in the holy exercise of mental prayer that we ought to take deep draughts of the fulness of the spirit of God. A well-made meditation is a guarantee of success in our work. As St. Paul puts it: "I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor.3:6).

Thus the anxiety and care which should come before everything else, is the care necessary for making our mental prayer well.

VI : ON THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

1. Death of the senses

The good God expects all Sisters of Notre Dame to be spiritually minded, since they are called by their vocation to work for the salvation of souls. Anyone who does not, from the first, put nature to death by the hard blows she deals out to it is not fit for our Institute and never will be.

It is no small thing to be destined to work for souls. An apostle says goodbye to all that belongs to a merely natural life, to everything material. He bears heat, cold, hunger, thirst; he is stripped of all things; he glories only in Jesus and in him crucified (1 Cor.11:2). So, too, our life requires souls untrammelled by the senses. The spirit of God cannot take possession of a soul given up to pleasures of sense, and without the spirit of God no sanctity is possible.

My dear sisters, it needs saints to lead others to sanctity, enlightened souls to enlighten others, perfect souls to help others to perfection. The only means of becoming good Sisters of Notre Dame is to let ourselves be filled with the spirit of God. But this divine spirit will only come upon us when we are in prayer. It is during meditation that he communicates himself to the soul, showers his gifts upon it, and inundates it with light. But it is not sufficient to be filled with the spirit of God only during our time of prayer; we must keep the divine spirit in our hearts. He will willingly dwell with us if we live a supernatural life. This means continual death to all appeals to the senses, to the imagination, and to self-will. A life that is supernaturalised is one of uninterrupted prayer. Let us give ourselves up completely to this life of the spirit, and declare war unto death upon the old Adam within us, who is for ever striving to get the upper hand.

2. The necessity of interior recollection

My good sisters, without the interior life it is impossible to be a Sister of Notre Dame. No one is capable of responding fully to the obligations of an apostolic life, who is not supported powerfully by help from within. The interior life puts us into direct and intimate communication with God. It renders us docile to the least inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and enables us to correspond faithfully with grace. No perfection is possible unless we labour seriously to attain the interior life. Its first principles are exterior and interior silence and recollection. The latter is necessary in order that we may ever be attentive to God and watchful over ourselves, and because the Holy Spirit only makes known what his love requires to souls who are perfectly recollected. We need also great docility to the lights vouchsafed to us by the Holy Spirit, and a constant and sincere abnegation of self.

The life of Jesus Christ can only be established within us after complete death to self, upon the ruin of all in us that is not God. The chief obstacles to the interior life are:

1. Infidelity to grace and to the touch of the Holy Spirit upon our souls.
2. A heart full of distractions and trifles.
3. Indulgence of the senses.
4. Self-seeking and self-love.

Ah, my dear sisters, let us be on our guard against self, let us go forward humbly, simply and with circumspection. When some obstacle hinders us from advancing, let us raise our mind and heart to the Holy Spirit, saying: "Oh, Spirit of fortitude and of light, triumph in me and for me. Establish the reign of thy grace in my soul, remove thence anything which hinders thy rule".

3. The interior life is necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame

A Sister of Notre Dame must lead a life of interior union with God, as if there were no one but God and herself in the world. She should enter as often as possible into the inner sanctuary of her soul to converse there "one to One" with God in order to grow into his likeness, just as we come to resemble those with whom we frequently converse.

We can live 'one to One' with God even in the midst of a class of restless children. A religious who is full of the spirit of faith does not stop at creatures; hidden beneath them she sees the image of God, the souls for which our Lord Jesus Christ gave up his life. Thus while she is teaching her children, her heart raises itself quite naturally to the heart of Jesus, begging him to protect in those little girls the image of his divine Father, and the merits of his own passion and death upon the cross. By a practice such as this it is always possible to keep oneself united to God. A Sister of Notre Dame must want only what God wants. She must have no attachment except to him, and must submit herself in every circumstance to his adorable will. The foundation of the interior life is complete self-abnegation and abasement, that is to say, humility. Without humility all other virtues are like powder scattered to the wind. That is why our divine saviour desired to preach by his acts as well as by word of mouth the grandeur of true humility and of self-abasement, the prerogatives in store for the little ones of God.

4. A Sister of Notre Dame must be a mystic

My dear sisters, a Sister of Notre Dame is called to be, in some ways, a mystic. St. Francis de Sales

says that "the commandments of God are conformable to reason, and that to live according to the commandments does not, of itself, raise us above the life of nature". Hence, my dear sisters, there are various vocations and inspirations for the execution of which God must necessarily raise us to something higher than a merely natural life. To love holy poverty, humiliation and suffering, to live in the world in a manner contrary to all its maxims, is something more than living as a good catholic and a good citizen. It implies something supernatural, a life at once spiritual and mystical, and because none can, of themselves, raise themselves in this way above nature unless God himself draws them out of a merely natural state, it follows that the mystical life is a sort of perpetual ecstasy, a long-continued rapture of action and operation.

It is to this sort of rapture that we are called, and to which we can aspire without fear. Indeed, we must aspire to it if we want to become perfect Sisters of Notre Dame. To all those called to our holy Institute God offers the grace necessary in order to become mystics in this way. Grace works a real transformation in our soul, for when we have attained this mystical life, each one of us can say with St. Paul: "I live, now, not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal.2:20). Furthermore, no ecstasy is recognised as genuine unless it results in this rapture of action and operation.

VII : ESTEEM OF OUR VOCATION

1.It is a privilege to work for souls

We, Sisters of Notre Dame, must have a great esteem for our holy state. We may hope to be of the number of our Lord's privileged little flock, of which Jesus spoke to St. Ignatius. We form part of that blessed flock, of that select number of apostles destined to procure the glory of God, by making him known and loved by the souls confided to our care. Jesus Christ loves these souls so intensely that he has promised the triple crown of martyr, doctor and virgin to those who devote themselves to so holy a work. Thoughts like these ought certainly to encourage Sisters of Notre Dame to make joyfully any sacrifices they may meet with in the pursuit of their holy vocation. Our life certainly presents many difficulties and frequent occasions in which nature finds much to overcome, but the good God gives to a faithful religious strong and efficacious graces, which enable her to conquer all obstacles for the greater honour and glory of God.

2.Our work resembles that of the apostles

We ought to esteem very highly our holy vocation, which puts us in a state of life approaching that of the apostles. My dear sisters, what are we to have been the object of God's choice and to be employed in a work which is the very greatest that can be accomplished on earth: the work of saving souls? Only God himself can fully understand the grandeur of the work confided to us. Meditate often upon the benefits included in a religious vocation. There is no other state upon earth so happy, none which can even approach it. We are separated from a corrupt world, sheltered from danger, and have examples of virtue ever before our eyes.

Do you not see, as I do, to what peril of eternal loss many young people of your own age are exposed every day? What have you done for our Lord to make him love you with such a love of predilection? Be faithful and very grateful. Esteem your happiness highly, even should it cost you many sacrifices, for the good God has a terrible judgement in store for us, whoever we are, if we do not correspond faithfully to his love which is jealous of our hearts.

3.Results of esteem of our vocation

Esteem for our vocation shows itself by persevering fidelity, a deep spirit of renunciation and detachment, and great purity of intention. A religious who understands the sublimity of her vocation will work at becoming very recollected in order to praise God in all her works. She who does not appreciate its grandeur, and the choice God has made of her, ordinarily begins by doing her actions with the intention of pleasing God, but by imperceptible degrees she forgets this and through want of vigilance ends by doing everything in a spirit of self-love.

I very easily recognise, my dear daughters, whether or not you are acting purely for God. When something is asked of a sister who acts from imperfect motives, or if her charge is changed, self-love shows itself at once, and one sees some unworthy attachment or attraction, or repugnance. The sister becomes impatient almost at once, she is put out and sometimes even goes so far as to murmur against God, who disposes of her through her superiors, in a manner contrary to her own personal inclinations. Then discontent follows, she obeys only because she must, and does not seek to please God in what she does, because she does not know how to sacrifice her own whims in order to please God. Those who rightly esteem their holy vocation never act like this. A true Sister of Notre Dame does not know what it is to listen to her own will; she is always content, in whatever manner she maybe treated, always ready to leave one employment to take up another. This is how a good Sister of Notre Dame ought to act, one who loves and imitates our blessed Lady, and who has the spirit of the Institute deeply rooted in her heart.

4. Religious life - a means of attaining perfection

Religious life is a means instituted by Jesus Christ for acquiring perfection and arriving at a high degree of sanctity. This is not to be understood only of exterior holiness, consisting in certain habits and a definite rule of life, in practices known only in convents. No, no! sanctity consists in the interior mortification of the senses, will and judgement; in the repression of inordinate affections; in being stripped of all love of creatures and in putting self-love to death. In particular, sanctity means union with God, and consists in holy charity, the spirit of prayer, and the total immolation of self for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

5. The advantages of religious life

If the advantages of religious life were known and appreciated by those living in the world, every man would embrace that holy state. The light by which the good God deigned to let us understand the happiness of following him is an immense grace, for, alas, people in the world are so ignorant on this point that they are astonished when some young girl declares her intention of entering a religious congregation. They treat her as if she were mad, and do not understand how any one can leave parents and country to go and spend the fairest years of youth in mortification, solitude, abnegation and the instruction of children. It is the good God, and he alone, who makes us see that such people reason falsely. It is he alone who makes us love and even prefer all that crucifies nature, because he has given us a taste of the excellence and dignity of our holy vocation. Dear sisters, what great things God has done for us in drawing us aside from the corruption of the world; we should be justly astonished if a king were to espouse one of the lowliest of his slaves, raising her to the royal dignity where everyone should do her honour. God has done much more for us. He has admitted us among the number of his spouses, and honoured us with the duty of teaching Christian doctrine to the young, under the authority of his bishops. How great is our vocation, and how we ought to value it above everything else, and endeavour to render ourselves worthy of it!

6. Earnest preparation for profession is necessary

My dear daughters, prepare yourselves well for the holy engagements you take upon yourselves by the vows of religion. In pronouncing the words which consecrate her to God's service, a Sister of Notre Dame renounces the world, all personal possessions, her family and herself, in order to have no other treasures than those of heaven; no other love than that of Jesus Christ, who becomes her spouse, no other occupation than the work of her perfection, attained by devoting herself heart and soul to the salvation of her neighbour. Let us correspond to the immense grace of our vocation by the faithful and perfect accomplishment of our holy rule and of all our duties.

7. On the Novitiate

The Novitiate is a precious time. You ought then to spend it in laying a solid foundation, for the whole building which we have to construct requires to be set on a solid basis, made of hard stone, that is to say, our religious life must be founded on solid virtues. The most necessary virtues are deep humility, perfect obedience, complete renunciation of self-love and death to our own judgement, together with a great love of holy poverty. Moreover, we must, if I may so express myself, incorporate in ourselves the spirit of our holy Institute, that spirit must be the foundation stone of our whole spiritual edifice. If we do not begin to lay these solid foundations in good time, dear sisters, our building will crumble to pieces. At the first check, we shall show how weak we are, how lacking in strength of character, since we are unable to overcome even a slight obstacle.

A sister evades this obstacle of going out to meet and embrace it, as would a true follower of Jesus Christ. What strikes me and grieves me the most is that I see you approaching the holy table so often without my being able to note any change in your conduct, or seeing you grow in the spirit of our Lord by a life of real self-abnegation. Sometimes I say: "My God, my God! what are you going to do with souls like these?" For you know, my dear daughters, that when a room is full of all sorts of things there is no place on which to sit down. Similarly when our heart is full of trifles, full of ourselves, full of anything and everything except God, you cannot expect that he will abide within us. I do not say that communions made in these dispositions are sacrilegious, but they are made without sufficient fruit. It is quite certain that if we made proper use of our communions, we should become as strong as lions. It was to obtain fortitude like this that the early Christians and the saints, before going to martyrdom, strengthened themselves with this heavenly bread. And we, no sooner do we come out of chapel after having received holy communion, than we fall at the least difficulty like a snowflake before the wind.

VIII : ON THE OBLIGATION OF WORKING AT OUR PERFECTION

1. The sublimity of our vocation

There are some souls whom God calls to a very high degree of perfection. If those souls chosen by God and marked out by his love for attaining a high degree of perfection, do not work to reach that degree, they will not save their souls.

The faults these souls commit, which to others not thus called, seem mere innocent faults of frailty, are for these chosen ones not only hindrances to perfection, but real obstacles to their salvation. My dear daughters, we have an example of this among the apostles. Once they were disputing about

who should have the first place in God's kingdom, and our Lord after rebuking them, took a little child, and placing him in the midst of the apostles, said: "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:17, also 9:46-48). Notice well that our Lord does not say "shall not be great in the kingdom of heaven" but says emphatically "shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven". This was because the divine master wished to train them to great things, and because he wanted to give them great graces, he had the right to ask much from them.

God being both just and jealous, wishes wholly to possess those whom he has chosen, and he holds their gifts in contempt, so to speak, unless they give him all they have and are. My good daughters, you are all called to the perfection of apostolic souls, but among you there are undoubtedly some whom God has, in a more particular manner, destined to become saints, even great saints. This I know for certain. Those souls ought to give themselves, or rather surrender themselves wholly to God, putting no limits to their generosity.

When St. Teresa saw the place prepared for her in hell, it was not because she had committed great faults, but simply because she was too much attached to creatures. The good God sent her this vision in order to root out these attachments, and disengage her completely from everything other than himself alone, so that he might raise the edifice of her perfection upon a solid foundation. The good God wanted to place St. Teresa among the seraphim and by this vision he gave her to understand that if she failed to correspond with his designs upon her in order to raise her to this height, she would fall into the lowest depths of hell. My dear daughters, there are souls who are called to a rare degree of sanctity, and the good God will not allow them to aspire to anything less perfect, in spite of all the reluctance of poor human nature. There are souls such as this in our Institute, to whom God has given immense graces. Let them arm themselves with courage, generosity, and humility, for if they do not reach the degree of perfection destined for them by God, they will fail in their holy vocation, and perhaps lose their souls.

2. The danger of not corresponding with grace

Souls that are careful about advancing in the spiritual life never let an occasion pass in which they can prove the sincerity of their love of God by the constant and complete immolation of themselves and of all that concerns them.

They immolate their mind, their judgement, their will. This costs much, it is true, but when a soul really loves the good God, she generously embraces sacrifice and gives herself no rest until self-love is completely vanquished. God, pleased with the goodwill of a soul who overcomes self in order to take her place by the side of Jesus Christ, sustains her with the powerful help of his grace, and encourages her by the sweetness of heavenly consolations. However, this state of things does not always last. A time comes when God tries a soul by grievous temptations and trials. He causes the soul to feel that the heavens are of brass and the earth of iron. But if that soul is generous and has the courage to remain faithful throughout this time of trial, she will come to recognise that her state of desolation was in reality only a proof of God's understanding love; a trial specially sent by him in order to make her advance rapidly in the path of perfection. God is obliged to use this apparent harshness towards us (in reality but proofs of his goodness and a stratagem due to his great love) in order to keep us truly humble, and to make us understand what we are when he leaves us to ourselves.

Oh, my dear daughters, give yourselves up once and for all to the good God, abase and immolate yourselves before him, offer yourselves to him as true and single-minded victims of his good pleasure. Let the good God do with you and in you, whatsoever he wills. Do not forget to ask him

to take from you what you are not generous enough to offer freely to him. But a true Sister of Notre Dame will give him all, and this so wholly and entirely that she has nothing left for him to take.

3. Love of the church and of souls

We must not look upon perfection as a matter of counsel but as a point of strict obligation. It is not enough to sigh after it, we must make every effort to attain it by the help of God's grace which is always offered to us.

People usually attribute public calamities to the disorders which are rife in the world, but this morning during meditation I asked myself whether there would not be more justice in putting them down, in part at least, to the low degree of sanctity practised by religious? It is the prayerful lives and self-immolation of religious men and women that obtain the peace and tranquillity of kingdoms, the calm happiness of family life, and a spirit of content among the people. It is from her religious, especially from us Sisters of Notre Dame, that the church expects good shepherds. Faith asks of us zealous confessors; holy missionaries count upon us for the success of their labours. Sinners await our help to obtain the powerful graces needed for their perfect conversion. Above all, the heart of Jesus expects of us that holy violence, that spirit of expiation and atonement which will disarm his just wrath, so justly kindled against unhappy sinners. To fulfil the vocation of a Sister of Notre Dame it is not sufficient to be a good and holy class mistress. No, we must always be busy about the salvation of souls, and of all souls without exception. We must devote ourselves without ceasing to all the interests of holy church, and take to heart in a practical way whatever concerns the glory of God.

There is no room with us for self-occupation, no question of being involved in the intricacies of self-love. A Sister of Notre Dame must produce something very different to all that. She must bear immense fruit in works of love, of zeal, of eminent holiness. It is only by humility that we can appease the just anger of God and by abasing ourselves profoundly before him: "He hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid". It was the humility of the blessed virgin which rendered her so pleasing in the eyes of God, and made of her an instrument of salvation for the whole world. In the same way, if God finds us very humble, very lowly, and holding ourselves as nothing before him, he will make us instruments for the saving of souls, angels of peace for the entire world. Never let us forget that we are "debtors" to souls and must devote ourselves wholly to them.

4. Means of attaining perfection

One of the chief means of advancing in perfection is to consider ourselves here below as travellers who are in a hurry to get to the end of their journey, and who press on eagerly, in spite of any obstacles which hinder them, or arouse their curiosity. They never turn aside, never delay their homecoming, even for an instant, so much do they long to find themselves once more in the bosom of their family.

The second means which tends greatly to the spiritual advancement of the soul is to think of ourselves as dead, allowing others to treat us just as they please. No matter whether they humble us, treat us with contempt, show us unkindness, calumniate us or flatter us - it should be all the same so far as we are concerned. A corpse takes offence at nothing, feels nothing, since its living principle has fled.

This is how we ought to behave. We ought to be so dead to self that we no longer live a natural life, but a supernatural one; "hidden with Christ in God" (Col.3:3). Ah, how quickly will those who thus

die a mystic death advance along the way of perfection; each step will be a stride. Nay, more wholly disengaged from the trammels of earthly things they will soar aloft to those of heaven, and in a very short time attain consummate perfection.

5. Mystic death

A Sister of Notre Dame must nourish her soul with the strong food of complete renunciation and continual death to self. Here she will find life. For her, if something costs, that is sufficient reason for her to embrace it; she ought not to know what is meant by repugnance for sacrifice. She must ever be holding herself in check, ever acting against nature; thus, some remark is on the tip of her tongue, she is longing to speak - let her impose silence on the heart and lips. Should she feel dislike to doing some particular thing, let her hasten to do it carefully and generously.

A soul who courageously perseveres like this in a path wholly opposed to her natural inclinations, will in a very short time, reach the state of mystic death to self. Then she will become an altogether new being, clothed throughout with Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14) and living only "**in him, by him, and for him**".

6. Fidelity - a means of attaining perfection

The best means of meriting fresh graces is to make good use of those which God, in his love, has already given us.

When God sees that a soul takes care not to let a single opportunity of proving her fidelity to him escape her, he pours out upon her, with both hands, as we say, very special graces, for God will never let himself be outdone in generosity. On the contrary, he takes note of even the least sacrifice we make for love of him, and will reward us for it.

Courage, then, my dear daughters, let us run like giants in the way of perfection. This is for us a strict obligation because we ought to be able, by being perfect ourselves, to contribute all the more efficaciously towards securing salvation for a host of other souls.

7. The captivity of the vows

From the moment we left the world to consecrate ourselves to God in religion as Sisters of Notre Dame, we ought often to repeat to ourselves what St. Paul, when he was in prison, said to the Jews of Rome who came to visit him: "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). My good daughters, with what immense joy and boundless gratitude we ought to say to ourselves: "I am a captive for the sake of Christ". It is quite true, we are held fast by the bond of holy obedience, but this state of captivity is our glory. Each one, in her inmost conscience, can bear witness to herself that she gave herself to the good God freely and utterly. Nobody forced us to do this. We were taken captive by the divine charm of the loving heart of Jesus. His love surprised us into becoming his prisoners, it conquered us once and forever.

But do not let us think that that is enough; rather, let us press on in the path of perfection. May each day, each hour of our lives rivet our chains more tightly upon us, for a fervent Sister of Notre Dame ought not to find these bonds heavy. On the contrary, she should desire to make them heavier than they are, so to say, in order that she maybe able to give her divine spouse one proof the more of her love, and be enabled to participate more fully in the work of redemption into which God has deigned to initiate her.

What a great vocation ours is! How strongly it calls for souls aflame with love, devoured by holy zeal!

8. Docility to the Holy Spirit

We ought to set to work in earnest at the great business of our perfection so as to be able to accomplish perfectly the designs of God in our regard. So long as a soul is attached to her own individual opinions and tastes, she will never attain the degree of perfection to which she is called by God. While she is continually wrapped up in herself, a prey to her own judgement, the Holy Spirit will not be able to work in her soul. To merit the favours of the Holy Spirit we must be generous.

When a soul acts like a miser towards God, when she goes along with ruler and compass in her hand measuring exactly what she is obliged to do under pain of sin, the action of the Holy Spirit is necessarily restricted. He gives her ordinary graces, those, that is, that are sufficient for saving her soul, whereas he inundates with his choicest favours and gifts souls who are generous and correspond faithfully to grace.

This then is what we must try to do: bring the Holy Spirit a large and generous heart, and strive to obtain, by ever increasing generosity, the special help we need in order to overcome the difficulties which crop up at every step in the path of our holy vocation, and strength to resist temptation and remain steadfast through every trial.

My good daughters, you are all called to the perfection of apostolic souls, but among you there are undoubtedly some whom God has, in a more particular manner, destined to become saints, even great saints. This I know for certain. Those souls ought to give themselves, or rather surrender themselves wholly to God, putting no limits to their generosity.

In this matter we must follow the dictates of our own conscience with the sole view of securing more glory to God, and promoting more efficaciously the salvation of souls.

9. Perfection in little things

Religious perfection does not consist in doing great things, but in doing perfectly whatever obedience prescribes, however insignificant the thing maybe in itself. It was by accomplishing perfectly their most trivial duties that several saints in the Society of Jesus, e.g. St. Aloysius Gonzaga and Blessed Berchmans (6) reached so high a degree of sanctity in such a short time:

1. Great union with God through love.
2. Complete detachment from their own will and judgement.
3. Great fidelity in doing ordinary things in a way that was not ordinary.

Where did they learn all this? We can hardly doubt that, as sons of the great St. Ignatius, they had in view only the greater glory of God, and knew no other desire than that of pleasing him.

10. Danger of sloth

Called by God as we are in a very special way to work without respite at our own perfection so that

we may help in the sanctification of our neighbour, we ought to respond with great generosity to this invitation to sanctity. God has freed us from all other cares in order that we may devote ourselves without anxiety or distraction to the work he requires of us.

It behoves us to work with the utmost zeal at our own perfection. For, since the measure of our perfection is also the measure of our influence in gaining others to God, there is no question of relaxing our efforts to attain sanctity.

Woe to us, my good sisters, if ever we allow ourselves to be overcome by sloth in the practice of virtue. On this path, if we do not keep on advancing, we go back and are overtaken by sleep; such conduct invites a serious fall.

Scripture tells us that Jonas slept while the sailors were deliberating who should be cast into the sea (Jonas 1:5,6); that Samson was asleep when he was made prisoner by the Philistines; that it was, likewise, while the good man of the house and his servants slept that cockle was sown among the wheat (Matt.13:24-30). These examples show us that we must always be on the watch by fervour and constant prayer, if we want to advance in perfection and become saints.

Unless you are saints, my good daughters, the work of God will perish among us, and at the judgement seat of God you will have to bear the weight of the thousands of souls whom the good God designed to save through the labours of us poor little women, to whom in his mercy and love he has given grace and strength sufficient to become apostles.

11. Perfection implies crucifixion of self

Do you remember that saying of our Lord: "No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62)? In the same way those who after leaving the world to give themselves to God, return to their own manner of judging and acting, and seek their own comfort and convenience, are not fit for the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame. We need valiant souls, brave and magnanimous hearts that never say "It is enough" when there is question of being devoted, or of some point of perfection. Only those who compete in a race can win the prize. And in the way of perfection we must go on running till our last breath, and spend ourselves even to death, so that we may be better able to help the souls confided to our care.

We do not belong to ourselves, my dear sisters. Religious perfection consists in the renunciation of all ownership in a life utterly stripped of self will and any kind of self seeking to be wholly occupied in the interests of God alone. See here the true self abnegation demanded of us by God, that perfect mortification and complete sacrifice of self love and our own private opinions which is the short cut to perfection for a Sister of Notre Dame. It is during mental prayer that we must learn the science of spiritual crucifixion such as God asks of souls whom he has called to the sublime duties of an apostolate. Certainly, the life of a Sister of Notre Dame is no life of ease and comfort. Modelled as it is on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, it should be a life of self abasement, of sacrifice, of crucifixion. Woe to the Sister of Notre Dame who does not live a life of self immolation. She misses altogether the end of that divine call which fixed its choice upon her, or rather, she is the victim of a dreadful illusion.

With a Sister of Notre Dame there must be no question of whims and fancies, of likes and dislikes. She must be utterly dead to all that kind of thing, and live only the life of Jesus crucified. Every day she must climb a few steps further up the hill of Calvary. This she will do by the help of the guide whom the good God has given her, to show her the way and to help her to bear the difficulties that

she will encounter. For to walk with safety in the path of perfection she must cast herself into the arms of her superior, leaving her free to dispose of her as she thinks best, for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

12. Perfection needs generosity of soul

Virtue alone will give true stability to the soul. In fact a truly virtuous soul will not spend time attending to trifles which only distract the mind but will go straight to God without any thought of self.

Such a soul will not argue with God when there is question of making some sacrifice, practising some mortification, accepting some humiliation, or fulfilling some act of obedience which is painful to nature. The truly virtuous soul hesitates at nothing because she serves the Lord for himself alone, not from self seeking. She never refuses anything God asks.

Such ought every Sister of Notre Dame to be if she wants to reach the height of perfection demanded by her holy vocation. She must draw from the heart of Jesus the courage necessary for maintaining herself constantly as a victim, which is what the good God asks her to be. A soul that has acquired virtue like this lives truly by faith. She regards only the will of him who is her sole heritage, her spouse. This enables her to be always even tempered, for she lives in God's holy presence, and by constant remembrance of him she urges herself to fight bravely and to do herself whatever violence is necessary to attain perfection.

There are no gaps in her conduct. She makes use of the whole of the time at her disposal for advancing in one way or another the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without seeking the praise or notice of others. A good Sister of Notre Dame does all, she suffers all for love of the good God. "What happiness", she says to herself, "by doing this I shall be one degree more like Jesus". Oh, when a soul appreciates the true worth of her vocation, she understands once and for all that sufferings are the only riches of a Sister of Notre Dame, riches which are the purchase money of souls.

13. Portrait of a good Sister of Notre Dame

A Sister of Notre Dame must be fast anchored in the spirit of our holy Institute. First, she must be profoundly humble - not in words, that is only a pretence and would soon be unmasked. The humility of a Sister of Notre Dame must embrace both lowliness of spirit and lowliness of heart. She must keep herself lowly, abased, and selfless. Next, she must be a model to all her sisters, showing herself meek, patient and kind while modesty radiates from her countenance. She must eagerly undertake all that is most repugnant to nature, run to secure the most humiliating tasks as her own, seek ever what is lowest and least in the community. She will always be faithful to the holy exercise of mental prayer, spending her meditation in a state of utter abasement before God, while her soul profoundly adores him.

A Sister of Notre Dame must be kind to all her sisters and always remain even tempered no matter what happens. Her perfect obedience will make her fly to execute the least sign of the wish of her superiors. Always deferential and respectful towards those set over her, she will never do anything without consulting them, going to them with the same confidence with which she goes to God. Perfect simplicity must be the hallmark of her whole conduct. Her devotedness should be so great that no fatigue or suffering could hinder the exercise of her zeal. Such is the portrait of a Sister of Notre Dame who is worthy of her vocation.

IX : ON THE CHARACTER AND OBLIGATIONS OF OUR HOLY VOCATION

1. The sublimity of an apostolic vocation

The good God has not only called Sisters of Notre Dame to the religious state but to a most perfect religious state, a state which ought to procure him most glory. For by our vocation we follow in the footsteps of priests, bishops and apostles, even of Jesus Christ himself, since his works on earth consisted chiefly in giving instruction and putting souls in the way of salvation.

We ought each to say frequently to ourselves: "God wants me to be very perfect, since he has called me to follow his divine Son, Jesus Christ, but he does not wish me to choose for myself what my work shall be. For this reason he has given me superiors whom I must obey as if I were obeying God himself. Moreover, God requires me to be completely indifferent regarding what I do, because in religion all tasks are equally great, those who serve do as much as those who teach.

A good Sister of Notre Dame who has the spirit of the Institute, looks at things in this way, and acts accordingly.

2. Need of recollection

My dear sisters, our vocation is one of the hardest to fulfil perfectly because we ought to be at one and the same time both Martha and Mary. If you do not keep yourselves in the presence of God, if you are not united to him, your instructions will bear but little fruit in the souls of your children; your work will be only an exterior performance, visible, perhaps to the eyes of men, but bringing forth nothing for eternal life. Intensify, therefore, the purity of your intention. Do all for God alone. All for his greater glory. If you are not virtuous yourselves, you cannot make others virtuous. No one can give what she has not got, and the good God will not bless your work.

3. Necessity of continual self denial

Those who consecrate themselves to God in the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame ought to be firmly determined to make all the sacrifices demanded by the sanctity of the apostolic vocation they have embraced. This means perpetual death to their own judgement, renunciation of all that flatters human nature, and a complete indifference regarding all that may be asked of them, not listening to anything suggested by natural repugnance, but rather reminding themselves of what our Lord Jesus Christ said in the gospel: "If any man will follow me let him deny himself" (Mark 8:34). We do not come into religion to be comfortable and live at our ease.

My good daughters, since you are destined to become evangelists and apostles, I warn you that you will never find comfort and natural satisfaction in the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame. There we look for and find much greater satisfaction; that of sacrificing oneself for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls; of stripping off the faults of one's natural disposition in order to put on Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 13:14).

Anyone whose soul is not stirred at the thought of these great and noble sources of satisfaction is not made for our holy Institute.

4. Religious must aim at perfection

The end to which we must aspire, my dear daughters, is perfection, sublime perfection. In our holy state of life, none of the degrees of perfection are works of supererogation, but the highest degree is a duty of the most stringent justice for every Sister of Notre Dame who, on account of the sublimity of her apostolic vocation, is called to attain the greatest perfection possible.

It is not child's play to have left the world; we did it in order to immolate ourselves to God without recall. If we do not work untiringly at attaining perfection, God will judge us severely at the last day. There will be no question of justifying ourselves by saying that the way was too difficult; the way God has laid down for us is very easy, and even those whose health is weak can run in it, if they have but courage and love. If God were to ask us to work miracles, to raise the dead, to practise austerities ruinous to our health, to fast on bread and water - in a word, if he asked us to ruin our health, we might raise an objection by saying that none of these things were in our power because we lived under obedience and we could only do what our superiors told us to do. But the good God only asks us very simple things:

1. To be united with him by the bond of love.
2. To fulfil our charge as perfectly as possible in order to please him.
3. To perform our most ordinary actions in a way that is not ordinary, as did St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and the Blessed John Berchmans.

What made these three such heroes of sanctity was their simplicity of intention, their fidelity, their unflinching perfection in the performance of the smallest duty. In these same practices consists the true heroism of a Sister of Notre Dame.

5. Perfection implies constant self denial

My good sisters, let no one think she has done something great when she has left the world and all the advantages she might have had there in order to consecrate herself to God as a Sister of Notre Dame. She has made, it is true, a little step forward towards her salvation; but all is not over, the greatest difficulty of all still remains. She has indeed quitted one world, but she brings another with her and that other is the most difficult of all to leave.

The world which we bring into religion with us is the world of our passions, which are continually rebelling within us. We quit this interior world by renouncing our own will, our own ideas, and by acquiring that spirit of self abasement and profound recollection which is indispensable to a Sister of Notre Dame, who is obliged by her state of life to tend to the highest perfection. The shortest way of reaching this perfection is complete death to self; constant and continual self denial.

A young girl is free to become a Sister of Notre Dame or not; but once she has pledged herself to the Institute she is no longer free to choose more or less perfection as her aim. If she neglects the care of her perfection she commits a great fault and fails in what is essential to the spirit of the Institute. In

fact, to be a good Sister of Notre Dame, complete self renunciation is necessary as well as willingness to be despoiled of everything. There are some among you who are yet a long way off this complete renunciation, but with the grace of God, courage, and a sincere desire to become a good Sister of Notre Dame, everyone can attain it.

6. The privileges of religious life entail responsibilities

The good God has given us an immense grace, my good daughters, in withdrawing us from the Babylon of the world to place us in the holy ark of religion, and by letting us rest in his divine heart which is the true cradle of a Sister of Notre Dame.

In this century a vocation is a greater grace than it was in the days when towns were full of convents. Now, the whole face of the earth is in a state of unrest, nations are all at war, and trouble is widespread, while we are at peace in the shadow of the tabernacle. (7) But, my dear sisters, the good God has called us to become apostles; we must not think only of living in peace, but must go forth to the conquest of souls - the poor souls of little children which are in danger of being lost by drinking of the water of iniquity with which the world abounds; when we think of people living in the world, we see them drinking deep of the cup of trouble and affliction, whereas the goodness of God preserves us from all the dangers with which they are threatened. Let us, then, take heart, let us be grateful, let us enter into the spirit of our holy vocation, let us always be true Sisters of Notre Dame - that is to say, victims always living and always dying. Always living by love and by the fire of a holy zeal for God's glory and the salvation of souls. Always dying by the unceasing immolation of our whole being to placate God, justly angered by our sins, and by those of the whole world.

7. Consolation and Desolation

The devotion of a Sister of Notre Dame ought not to consist in having consolation in her meditation, in feeling great fervour during vocal prayer, in having no repugnance or difficulty in the fulfilment of her charge. No, nothing of all that is required to make a good Sister of Notre Dame.

A good Sister of Notre Dame must make her devotion consist in persevering in meditation, in spite of dryness and weariness, in complete abnegation of self, in an entire abandonment of her will and judgement into the hands of her superiors, in receiving everything as coming from the divine hand and heart of God.

You ask how you can know that a sister is advancing in perfection, and I answer: "Show me a sister faithful to her meditation, simple and open with her superior, a sister who loves her duty and fulfils her charge as well as she can in order to please God, and I will say that that sister is certainly advancing in perfection".

8. Duties incumbent on every Sister of Notre Dame

In our Institute we have two important duties to perform. The first is to nourish ourselves in fervent piety. What good will it do us to have gained the whole world for God, if we unhappily come to be lost ourselves? To keep ourselves far removed from this danger, let us take great care to keep up our pious practices and to cling to all the principles instilled into us during our novitiate. For this end we must cultivate a great spirit of prayer and be very particular never to omit our meditation. We must prepare it carefully, and then follow humbly and faithfully the action of the spirit of God in our souls. Let us be exact in making, according to the spirit of our vocation, our general and particular examen, and prepare ourselves with zealous care for the reception of the sacraments. By receiving

them we feed our souls with the life of grace, fill ourselves with our Lord's spirit and become "other Christs" living an interior life, and acting only on supernatural principles.

Our second duty is to apply ourselves to the study of the branches of knowledge necessary in our Institute. We cannot dispense ourselves from work of this kind without failing in our holy rule, acting contrary to the intentions of our superiors, without indeed offending God and putting ourselves in danger of losing his grace and, in consequence, our very vocation. We must not, therefore, look upon study only as a useful and necessary means towards successful teaching and as something enjoined by obedience, but as a duty of rigorous justice.

It is not enough to be admitted into our holy Institute, my good sisters; you must assimilate its spirit. You ought to ask God every day to give you this spirit; bring all your courage to bear upon it, and allow yourselves to be trained by your superiors. But above all, drink in the spirit of God during the time of prayer.

Watch yourselves, for the devil will leave no stone unturned in order to lead you away from the spirit of your holy vocation, in order that God may be robbed of glory and many souls maybe lost.

9. Virtues characteristic of Sisters of Notre Dame

A Sister of Notre Dame who is thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of her holy vocation, can make her own the words Solomon spoke concerning wisdom: "All good things came to me together with her" (Wis.7:11). If we do not build our edifice on solid foundations it will soon go out like a candle; those who witnessed its birth will see it perish, and that, because the first stones were not firmly set in the spirit of prayer, in blind obedience, in holy charity, in profound humility, and in true mortification.

10. The privileges attached to the practice of holy poverty

There is no state of life in the church greater in the eyes of faith than the state of religion, especially if it includes the apostolic life. Now, our holy Institute involves the calling of an apostle. In meditating on the dignity of your vocation, my good daughters, do not ignore its obligations. To attain the perfection which our kind of Institute demands, it is necessary to be keenly alert in acquiring all religious virtues. We must force ourselves to reproduce in our souls as perfectly as possible, the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom every Sister of Notre Dame must take for her sole inheritance. We must learn poverty from our divine saviour, especially that poverty which strips us of everything. Then we shall rejoice when something is lacking to us, and always wish to have for our use the poorest things in the community. But all this would be very little if the virtue of a Sister of Notre Dame went no further. My good daughters, we must long after the ordinary consequences of poverty, humiliations and contempt.

We ought also to aim carefully at preserving that perfect purity so dear to God. The means for safeguarding and perfecting this virtue is an entire mortification of all our external senses, as our holy rule teaches. We must punish our senses as soon as they dare to rise against us, bringing all sorts of distractions in to our soul. Giddiness and frivolity tarnish the soul and impede therein the action of the Holy Spirit who takes possession of a soul only in proportion to its degree of purity.

Sisters of Notre Dame ought, above all, to learn from their divine model obedience even to crucifixion. It is not only exterior obedience, an obedience which saves appearances, that God demands of us, my dear sisters, but an obedience of the judgement which immolates to divine God

pleasure even the very last fibre of self will.

This is the exemplar on whom we should form ourselves - Jesus crucified. We must identify ourselves with the spirit of our Institute, which is a spirit of renunciation and total death to self. If you could only understand these things from the beginning, from the very day you enter the Institute, my dear sisters, you would not spend a long time amusing yourselves with trifles, but in a short space you would become truly apostolic souls, strong and generous souls, entirely devoted to the interests of God alone.

11. On loving Jesus Christ as the spouse of our soul

My dear sisters, often ponder on St. Bernard's words: "Take heed, my daughter, and cultivate thoughts worthy of the honour bestowed on you by God. Remember that you are the spouse of Jesus Christ, and close your heart to every other call".

We cannot love God as he has loved us; equality in love is impossible. But love implies imitation. For us, Jesus left his heavenly Father, he gave himself up to be a victim in our stead; for us, he died upon the cross. See there the path of religious life traced out for us. To leave all for God, to come into religion, to give ourselves up to our superiors who represent God, allowing ourselves to be crucified by holy obedience.

But that is not all. For a Sister of Notre Dame, God has done still more. After having made her his spouse, he makes her an apostle. He initiates her into the greatest of all vocations here below. You know, my dear daughters, what our Lord said to his apostles: "Go, teach all nations" (Matt.28:19). Our zeal ought to be wider than the universe. All souls are ours, and we ought to love them all, to be ready to shed our blood for them all.

My good sisters, to respond to the honour of this apostolate to which God deigns to call us poor feeble women as we are, we ought to overcome all feminine weaknesses and become manly souls, intrepid souls which cast not a look towards self; souls that have no other end in view, no other desire than the greater glory of God.

12. Zeal for souls necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame

My good sisters, by our religious vocation we are called to perfection but to attain the end of our holy Institute there is need of very great perfection indeed. God has placed us in an exalted position, for nothing is greater to the eyes of faith than the vocation of an apostle. There is no longer any question of self occupation, my good sisters; you must lose yourselves in the heart of Jesus, and leave yourselves there while you run to save souls. Our Lord used to say to St. Catherine of Siena: "Think of me, and I will think of you". He says just the same to you.

In your meditations you must dwell upon the obligations you contract towards Almighty God, not only with regard to those souls confided directly to your care, but with regard to all souls whatsoever. Your zeal ought to embrace them all, and you should offer yourself as a victim for all.

A Sister of Notre Dame must be unceasingly busy about the interests of God - interests deeply concerned with the salvation of souls. Her thoughts, her feelings, her actions, everything about her, ought to be constantly directed to the salvation of souls. There can be no rest for us here below, until we are certain that the whole human race is saved. Alas! this certainty will never be ours. Ah! my God, even if we could be sure all souls were saved, we should still have to devote our lives to bring them to greater perfection; and so take heart, my good daughters. Take heart! work the work of

God with all your strength, have great, magnanimous souls, souls that will not shrink at any sacrifice. Those who belong to God, ought to belong to him wholly, without reserve; they ought to devote themselves, to spend themselves even to their last sigh.

13. The spirit of the Institute

My good sisters, you must make the spirit of our holy Institute your most special study. In vain will you possess all the knowledge in the world, or even practise great and remarkable virtue, if you do not always act under the guidance of this spirit; without it you will be able to do nothing of any worth for God's glory, and will be but useless members of the Institute. To have this spirit, a sister must in the first place possess a perfectly simple simplicity: NOTHING OUGHT TO BE SIMPLER THAN THE HEART OF A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME. It ought to be as transparent as crystal. Nay, purer even than this. For crystal reflects all the colours of the rainbow, and the heart of a Sister of Notre Dame must reflect nothing but God.

In the second place our spirit requires a limitless charity, deep humility, and straightforward obedience. As soon as we have acquired these fundamental virtues, we shall have no difficulty in acquiring all the rest.

You must remember, my good sisters, that the road along which we have started is strewn with thorns, we must let them prick and tear our evil inclinations, without noticing the wounds they make. In this way self love is brought under the winepress, and room is made in our hearts for the spirit of God.

The devil will give us no peace. He will tell us that we have undertaken too much for our strength. Hold his lying tricks in contempt, dear sisters, and keep your confidence in God so strong that the devil must perforce be overcome. Take heart! God is stronger than all the devils together, and his arm upholds you, while his sacred heart watches over you, and affords you a shelter from every danger. If you are vanquished in this struggle, it will be because you allowed yourself to be conquered, my good sisters, for the good God has put his power and his love at your disposal. One look towards him, and victory is assured. There must be nothing petty, nothing womanish in our Institute. It needs souls above the ordinary, souls who fear nothing on earth except sin, because sin is a turning away from God.

14. The Institute requires generous souls

Our holy Institute requires courageous souls, fearless souls who are no more afraid of a temptation than of a fly buzzing about them - it may bother them, but it cannot do them any harm. There is no room among us except for generous and large hearted souls. There are many difficulties in our life; let all young girls who ask to be received be well warned of this. Nevertheless, with courage and a heart aflame with love of God it is possible to rise superior to all the sacrifices which present themselves at every step, and to find happiness, holy joy even, in being immolated without reserve to the glory of God. When God withdraws a soul from the world, and seals it with the vocation of an apostle, his grace does all. He only asks for humility and courageous fidelity.

O, my dear sisters, let it never be said that a Sister of Notre Dame has been known to refuse anything God asked. A soul that could do this would be cowardly and utterly unworthy of a place in the ranks of God's apostles.

15. Energy is necessary in work for God

Magnanimous souls are needed to accomplish God's work; souls of a holy boldness that recoil at no obstacle; souls which forget themselves completely in order to spend themselves without reserve for others, souls ready to devote themselves till death to the work confided to them. My good daughters, souls occupied with themselves, who pay attention to the least little suffering, can never fulfil the sublime vocation of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Those who are in the seventh heaven so long as nothing disturbs them, but who, on the smallest occasion requiring self conquest are cast down and discouraged, are too petty to respond to our vocation.

We must have souls of vigorous bent, having quiet yet persevering energy; courageous souls who take fright at nothing; souls who, when they commit a fault, humble themselves before God, asking his help to begin again, because they recognise that but for divine grace they would have fallen still lower. My dear sisters, Sisters of Notre Dame must be modern apostles, and the apostles rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer something for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the thought of the grandeur of your vocation fill your hearts, and do not degenerate therefrom.

16. The duties of our state

My dear sisters, be well convinced that Sisters of Notre Dame will be judged in a particular manner with regard to three things: Obedience, the keeping of the rule, and the instruction of the young.

i. On obedience: do not let us be deceived; if God, to set us an example, obeyed his own creatures and even his executioners, what sort of judgement will await us if we do not submit in heart and mind to our superiors? If all Christians are obliged to imitate the example of Jesus Christ, how much more are religious so bound? Sisters of Notre Dame especially, who make profession of obedience and undertake to imitate their divine spouse ought to submit without question to whatever is enjoined them. They ought to lose themselves in holy obedience, saying as our Lord did when speaking of his heavenly Father: "I do always the things which please him" (John 8:29). We always do what is pleasing to God when we render interior and exterior obedience to our superiors, who are for us God's interpreters.

ii. On our holy rule: we ought to make it our study to reproduce the holy rule in ourselves in every detail of our conduct; to be in fact living rules. If we fail in points of rule we cannot excuse ourselves and say we did it through ignorance. That is quite impossible. If we fail, it is for want of thought or through cowardice.

3. On the instruction of the young: The good God has not brought the Sisters of Notre Dame together just for the sake of making them his chosen people, sequestered from all the dangers of the world, in order to save them alone. No, he formed our Institute to gather into it souls strong in faith and love, who, while working at their personal perfection, devote themselves unremittingly to the instruction of youth in order to bring souls into the way of salvation.

Our Lord had specially in view the children of the poor, the most neglected portion of human society. For this reason, Sisters of Notre Dame must allow nothing to turn them away from their purpose. They must endure and overcome all trouble and contradiction, conquer their natural repugnances, willingly accept humiliation and contempt in order to gain an entry into the most hardened souls. They must love children who misbehave, and must win their affection in order to teach them the truths of Christian doctrine, to make them know and love the good God, and so bring them into the right path for heaven.

God will demand from each sister a rigorous account if she has neglected even one of the little souls confided to her.

17. Growth in virtue

The end of our Institute is so elevated and sublime that it accepts only chosen souls, great in heart and mind, manly and generous in disposition. Above all, it demands souls of prayer, strong souls steeped in the interior life - persons filled with the spirit of the good God. You have not all these great and beautiful dispositions when you enter, my dear sisters, but the good God holds them in reserve for the souls whom he calls to be Sisters of Notre Dame. If you give yourselves up with docility to his action in your souls you will acquire, little by little, those great qualities which are indispensable to a religious who is an apostle.

When you enter here you are like young apple trees just planted; they bear no fruit the first year, but they go on growing; then come buds which develop into blossoms, from which finally the fruit is formed. When the fruit is ripe, it is gathered from the tree, its pips are taken out and planted in their turn and new trees spring up. In the novitiate you begin to grow, then you begin to show the budding virtues which the grace of God and the cultivation of your souls by your superiors ought to develop in you.

Later on come the fruits of humility, meekness, holy charity, ardent zeal, generosity and the rest. The pips represent the word of God which you are called to plant in the hearts of the children confided to you; this word of God will, with the help of grace, bear fruit in its turn and you will see, throughout the happy ages of eternity, that by doing good to one child, you have saved a whole generation.

Ah, my good daughters, appreciate well the grace of your vocation. How grateful you ought to be to the good God who has withdrawn you from the corruption of the world and brought you into this holy house, there to live in solitude with our good Jesus and to be trained for the most noble of all vocations - the vocation of an apostle.

Saturate your souls thoroughly with gratitude and love that you may rejoice when you have something to suffer, in order to be able to show Almighty God that you know how to immolate yourself for love of him. Run, my dear sisters, run after humiliations and crosses, as the thirsty stag runs towards a spring of water.

Often remind yourselves of the price the apostles paid in order to convert the world, of all it cost them to snatch souls from the gates of hell and give them to Jesus Christ. Since you, too, are apostles, you must accustom yourselves to sufferings, humiliations and crosses; these are the true springs whence the soul becomes strengthened and ennobled, because by these she learns to forget self, to be detached from all things, to become a chosen instrument in the hand of her divine master.

18. Need of acquiring the spirit of the Institute

The great aim of a Sister of Notre Dame ought to be to acquire the spirit of her Institute. She ought to have continually on her lips and more often still in her heart the words: Is this according to the spirit of our holy Institute?

When little difficulties arise she should say to herself: I must overcome this difficulty, bear this suffering, renounce my own will, trample self love underfoot, because that will be acting according

to the spirit of my vocation.

A Sister of Notre Dame ought to have a great horror of her own opinion and judgement which can find no place at all in the spirit of the Institute, but is totally opposed to it, and she ought to work with unremitting courage to root out this spirit of self determination.

Very great humility is needed to accept correction and to recognise one's fault with simplicity and a will to overcome self. Anyone who is obstinate in adhering to her own views is worthless as a Sister of Notre Dame unless she makes up her mind to despise all the suggestions of self love.

19. Self will, an obstacle to grace

The spirit of our holy Institute consists in great abnegation of self, total and entire surrender to one's judgement, true and deep humility, perfect obedience, and submission to the good pleasure of God as made known through our superiors, and a courage proof against all sorts of trials.

It is especially by cultivating an interior spirit and great contempt of self that we can acquire the great virtues which are the foundation upon which all Sisters of Notre Dame should work.

To acquire the spirit of our Institute and to become fit instruments for procuring the greater glory of God, we must shrink from nothing that hurts poor human nature, for if we are not anchored in the cross, we shall be merely building on shifting sand and at the first gust of the wind of temptation our would-be virtues will be blown away, and the whole scaffolding of the perfection we imagined ourselves to possess will fall to the ground. Attachment to one's own judgement is a vulture which preys upon souls and destroys the beginnings of even the highest virtues.

It is impossible, my dear sisters, that a person who deliberately clings to her own way of seeing things should make any progress in virtue. Such a soul is always in opposition to God in the many different things enjoined her by the voice of her superior. How can the good God bestow his graces on a soul which is discontented and always has some objection to make and who cannot submit fully and blindly in anything? God only gives his graces to those who are simple, submissive, humble and completely dead to self.

Come, my good sisters, let us love holy obedience above everything else in order to merit the gifts and blessings of our Lord. Woe to cowardly souls who are an obstacle to the blessings the good God is ready to shower down upon our holy Institute, if only he finds there Sisters of Notre Dame after his own heart.

20. A Sister of Notre Dame must lead a life of self sacrifice

My good sisters, the life of a good Sister of Notre Dame is a life of continual sacrifice, a constant and entire immolation of self to the good pleasure of God, as manifested to us by our superiors.

Now, because we ought to accomplish the divine and adorable will of God, always and in all things we must of necessity moment by moment, put self will to death, and live in a state of holy indifference.

At the first sign of our superior's wish we should be ready to embrace what seems difficult and repugnant to nature. Occasions for doing this are not rare in the life of a Sister of Notre Dame, for a superior must not consider whether such a thing is likely to please or to displease those under her.

Her sole consideration ought to be whether what she proposes is pleasing to God and conducive to his greater glory. Our superiors ought to be so convinced that our only desire is to practise complete self denial, that they need never consider whether we are ready and willing to accept whatever is asked.

There is no peace and tranquillity for a soul except in the practice of this holy indifference, that is, in a childlike and perfect surrender of self to the guidance of the good God in our regard whatever it may be. Souls of this type are true Sisters of Notre Dame. They alone enjoy solid interior peace, a peace which is never shared by imperfect souls, and which the latter would be quite unable to appreciate.

21. A Sister of Notre Dame must live for others

A good many people imagine that those who become nuns enter religion with a view to occupying themselves solely with their own salvation and personal perfection. It is not thus that we must understand the vocation of a Sister of Notre Dame. My dear sisters, such an aim is not sufficient for us. To the desire of saving our own soul we must add the desire and determination of saving many others. We must devote ourselves to securing the salvation of little children by instructing them thoroughly so that by this means they may be set on the way to heaven.

On the day of judgement the good God will not ask a Sister of Notre Dame: "Did you spend several hours a day in contemplation? Have you reduced your body to submission by fasts and other corporal austerities?" No, our Lord will say to her: "Have you worked perseveringly at your own perfection with a view to sanctifying your neighbour? Have you during the whole of your religious life expended yourself in showing to all the souls whom the good God committed to your care the way along which they must walk in order to attain eternal life?" You see, my good sisters, the question here is, have we responded to the end of our holy Institute?

We ought to regard as a dangerous temptation a thought which sometimes presents itself to certain souls that they would serve God much better if they occupied themselves exclusively with their own perfection. They would like to be able to gauge their own little measure of sanctity, leave your own perfection in his divine hands, with all that concerns it. We ought gladly to sacrifice the satisfaction of rendering ourselves an account of our progress, and after having spent on our soul the full time allowed for this in our holy rule, we should give all the rest to saving the souls of others.

The prayer and good work most conducive to our progress in perfection are apostolic prayer and apostolic work. Bring to our Lord an abundant harvest of souls, and he will inundate you with the plenitude of his sanctity. The heart of Jesus feels itself responsible, as it were, for the perfection and sanctification of souls who devote themselves without stint, and are forgetful of self for the sake of others. He gives them, in some sort, infused virtue. So take heart, my good sisters, let us run after souls, let us love them in order to make them in their turn love the good God in this world, so that we may glorify him with them for all eternity in the next.

22. Self esteem has no place in a true Sister of Notre Dame

To become fit to glorify the good God in the Institute of Notre Dame, we must renounce ourselves and surrender ourselves entirely into the hands of our superiors who, to the eyes of faith, hold the place of God himself. We should let our superiors do with us whatever they please without entertaining a contrary thought or saying to ourselves: "Why am I treated like this? It seems to me that I am admirably fitted for such a post, and that I did my charge as well as, or even better than,

Sister So-and-so". This is but the reasoning of self love. A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME MUST BELIEVE THAT SHE IS GOOD FOR NOTHING, OR CAPABLE OF ANYTHING, ACCORDING AS HOLY OBEDIENCE EMPLOYS HER, OR SETS HER ASIDE.

We ought to have great faith in the arrangements made by authority. It is the good God who inspires and directs superiors, and his grace always accompanies those who submit humbly. Sometimes a soul seemingly abased to the dust, becomes in that state an instrument bringing forth fruit interiorly by her total self abnegation; at another time she will be given some office which she thinks beyond her limited capacity. In this case, if she does not reason about the matter but trusts in the grace that is hers as a member of our holy Institute, she will work marvels and accomplish much solid good in spite of her lack of ability, whereas another who relies on her natural endowments without any humble self diffidence and with less trust in God, would fail utterly and completely.

A Sister of Notre Dame must always be content, allowing herself to be used for this or that, placed in office or relieved of it, ever ready to go from a house or return there. She must be equally willing to be all-important or counted as nothing without being upset, or losing even for an instant, her joy of spirit and the peaceful tranquillity of her soul.

"The earth is the Lord's" (Ps.23). Therefore a good Sister of Notre Dame is at home everywhere because everywhere she finds her good God to glorify and souls to be saved. Perfect self surrender ought to be the virtue par excellence of a Sister of Notre Dame. She must always be ready for three things: to go to confession, to receive holy communion, and to die.

23. We must be victims of God's good pleasure

Anyone who is thinking of becoming a member of our holy Institute should prove herself and sound the dispositions of her heart before engaging irrevocably to follow our vocation. During the novitiate and before binding herself by the vows of religion, she should examine herself on four points:

- i. Whether she is ready to renounce entirely her own way of thinking and judging, and to surrender her will and judgement into the hands of her superior.
- ii. Whether she is willing, at the least indication of the wish of her superiors, to devote herself as thoroughly to the lowliest and most tiring tasks, as to the more exalted duties of an apostolic life.
- iii. Whether she is content to let her chief study be upon the spirit and rules of the Institute in order to make them the guide and rule of her whole conduct.
- iv. Whether she is disposed to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only when that good master teaches the lowly and the humble, but when he climbs painfully up the hill of Calvary carrying his heavy cross.

My dear sisters, we are victims after the example of our blessed Lord. In order to enter into the interior dispositions of our Lord, and to practise as did our divine exemplar the true spirit of self immolation, we must keep our Lord constantly before the eyes of our mind in order to be able to act in conformity with him. Thus, whatever we happen to be doing, we should often ask ourselves, "How did Jesus pray, how did he take his meals, how did he sanctify the recreation he took with his apostles? In what manner would Jesus have obeyed?" and so on for the rest of our duties. If you have the happiness of being able to occupy yourself thus with the life of our good master, you will

make great progress in a very short time, and our good saviour will himself teach you the interior sentiments with which such acts should be accompanied. He will hold sweet converse with you concerning the glory of his heavenly Father, and will himself raise you to the state of victims.

Oh, my dear daughters, bring a docile spirit, an eager and teachable heart to these lessons of our dear Lord for in them are united every possible advantage.

24. The spirit of Martha and Mary

The end of our Institute is sublime, because it unites the spirit of both Martha and Mary. Like the apostles, we must go out and conquer the world without being afraid of the difficulties or snares it sets in our way. There must be nothing petty about a Sister of Notre Dame. She must have the strong heart of a man and a generous soul filled with the spirit of the good God. You know well, my dear sisters, the noble work which our Lord has confided to us. He has put souls into our hands, to whom he desires us to teach the truths of salvation; souls whom he asks us to make ready for heaven in order that they may glorify him for all eternity. Each one of these souls is made to the image and likeness of God, each is a breath of the divinity, each has been bought at the price of the precious blood of Jesus. It was for them that Christ came upon earth. He initiates us into this sublime office. Like him we must love souls in order to gain them for him, in order to entice them to good. We must teach our little girls to flee evil and to practise virtue.

My dear sisters, we are called to do what our Lord did when he was upon earth. To cooperate in the plenitude of our vocation we must love and seek suffering, humiliation and contempt. We ought to rise above all the weakness and pettiness of our sex, and fear neither difficulties nor sufferings, when there is a question of promoting God's glory. We must also be like Mary. Following her example we must give ourselves up interiorly to the contemplation of God and to union with our Lord. Without ceasing to fulfil all our exterior duties, we must cultivate the spirit of prayer.

WITHOUT THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER THERE IS NO TRUE SISTER OF NOTRE DAME.

It is during our hour of prayer that our Lord communicates to us his designs on the little souls he has entrusted to our care and fills us with his own divine spirit, pouring out his graces upon us so that they may overflow upon our children who will thus be nourished by our superabundance. During his life on earth our saviour when he wished to pray often left the crowds that followed him and withdrew into a place apart. He did this for our example.

25. Interior mortification

As we cannot practise great austerities we must limit our instruments of penance to those allowed. But a soul that is courageous and desirous of mortifying herself will find in our manner of life a great many exterior mortifications as well as many interior ones which are far more trying to poor human nature than a hair shirt. These interior penances surpass the former in value because they crucify us all the more by the fact that they are known only by God, for whose sake they are performed. A good Sister of Notre Dame, eager to sacrifice herself to God, is not occupied about her own little needs and conveniences, nor does she expect others to be concerned about her. She has neither desires nor fears. She is always ready to put aside or to undertake everything at the first word of obedience. She knows how to deny herself the satisfaction of conducting some piece of work to a satisfactory conclusion. After bearing with all the mistakes and labour consequent upon its commencement, she gladly yields to another all the credit of success. In things like that, nature suffers far more than by wearing a steel bracelet. It is in this spirit of constant death to self that a Sister of Notre Dame must live if she would know and appreciate the sublimity of the vocation to which she has been called by God.

26. What is required by the spirit of the Institute

In order to obtain the spirit of our Institute we must ask it of God during our time of prayer. He alone can make us truly understand it, he alone can penetrate our whole being with this spirit and help us to direct our lives according to its guidance. We ought always to have recourse to mental prayer for obtaining both light to understand properly the words the good God puts upon the lips of our superiors, and strength to put them into practice.

TO HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE INSTITUTE IS TO LIVE IN UNION WITH GOD BY BLIND OBEDIENCE which puts to death self will and our personal judgement. BY FORGETFULNESS OF SELF which leaves us free to be occupied solely with the interests of God and the holy Church. BY SILENCE in order to acquire the interior spirit. BY SIMPLICITY which leads to straightforwardness with our superiors. This union with God will also lead to SELF SURRENDER which accepts with holy indifference all that authority arranges for us, and makes us ready to leave Namur.

Union with God will also make us LOVE COMMON LIFE and be very punctual and exact in fulfilling all community exercises. It will fill us with HOLY CHARITY so that we love one another as our Lord has loved us.

No Sister of Notre Dame must have a selfish heart - she must be large hearted and generous. It is not for nothing that we have the blessed virgin Mary, our Lady, for both mother and sister. She had a great and loving heart, and if we want to be her true daughters and worthy sisters, we must dilate our souls and urge them to the sublime height aimed at in our holy Institute. This demands burning zeal for God's greater glory and for the salvation of souls and, in a special manner, particular care of children who are most neglected and despised. The spirit of our holy Institute is a spirit of humility, simplicity, cordial charity, and obedience - a spirit, in fine, which leads to complete abnegation of self, seeking not its own glory but the greater glory of God. It is a spirit which, far from manoeuvring to get appointed to offices of importance, ever seeks to abase itself and to be occupied in the discharge of the most menial and humiliating duties. It is a spirit of intimate converse with God, going straight to its end without any human respect or any little contrivances to obtain its own personal preferences. Finally, it is a spirit which loves to obey much better than to command, which is more zealously desirous of being straitly bound under authority than of being allowed to follow self will.

27. Self abnegation

Anyone who enters our holy Institute must set to work at once to destroy self love.

In the world many people are occupied solely with themselves. There must be no question of that among Sisters of Notre Dame. The only question with them is of a much more important science, the study of the best means of promoting the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. For this we must destroy self. That does not mean, of course, that we must destroy our bodies. The destruction I speak of is that of self love. We must hold our judgement in check, impose silence on our own way of thinking and looking at things in order that we may think of and see them only with the eyes and from the point of view of our superiors. The destruction of self love in these points is absolutely necessary if we are to render ourselves fit to attain the real end of our Institute.

Happy are those who work without respite at this spoliation of self. In a very short time they will see

springing up in their souls those virtues most suited to a sublime vocation like ours:

1. Perfect conformity to the will of God.

This consists in receiving all that it pleases God to send us, good or ill, with equal submission and gratitude.

2. Profound humility

This keeps the thought of our nothingness and weakness constantly before our minds, and will make us love our abjection and all the humiliations, whether exterior or interior, with which from time to time God is pleased to visit us.

3. Blind obedience

This makes us have neither eyes to see nor ears to hear nor tongue to speak nor judgement to discuss, once authority has spoken or given even a sign of desiring anything whatsoever to be done.

4. True charity, great modesty, and an intense love of silence.

The practice of these virtues bespeaks the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts.

X : ON VOLUNTARY POVERTY

The first Christians were fervent and ready to sacrifice all to God, and even to fly to martyrdom because they had actually, or in desire, despoiled themselves of all their riches and worldly goods. They walked in the footsteps of our Lord who taught by word and example the virtue of holy poverty. It is impossible to follow our blessed Lord closely so long as we are attached to anything whatsoever. The words of our saviour are very precise and positive: "Leave all and follow me". A Sister of Notre Dame must not be content with mediocre virtue. She must not limit her spirit of poverty by reducing it to mean having what is necessary. She must be glad to be in want of something necessary occasionally, and should rejoice when she has to suffer some little privation. What happiness it is when a community sometimes experiences need and knows how to rejoice sincerely about it and thanks God for allowing it. A Sister of Notre Dame will not experience peace, rest and joy until she has truly renounced "the flesh pots of Egypt". Then indeed her divine spouse will nourish her with the manna of the desert, with his divine and solid consolation. But to obtain this desirable manna, the soul must be stripped of all things. Ah, my dear sisters, dare we compare our poverty to that of our Lord Jesus Christ, naked in the crib and on the cross? Alas, what comparison is there? The Lord of heaven and earth lacks even what is necessary. He is born in a poor stable - there is no light for him, no fire. He is warmed by the breath of animals and borrows their straw to lie upon. During thirty years God-made-Man lived on the poor, ordinary food of a simple craftsman.

Throughout his public life he awaited what was given as alms, eating the bread of charity bestowed upon him by those whom he taught. He had nowhere to lay his head. He died in the most abject poverty, having no earthly goods except his cross, his crown of thorns and his iron nails. How much suffering and indignity were caused by his poverty, and this, my dear sisters, is our God, our spouse. Let us be confounded and die of shame for comparing our poverty with his. How little a Sister of Notre Dame understands her vocation, how unworthy she is of the alliance she has contracted with her divine spouse if she still loves her own ease, if she does not rejoice when something necessary is lacking and she feels the pinch of poverty which renders her less unlike her crucified Jesus. My dear

sisters, we need souls whom nothing can rebuff, absolutely nothing. Such souls will delight the heart of Jesus.

XI : ON KEEPING THE HOLY RULE

1. Our rule, the key of heaven

There is a great difference before God between religious who are faithful to all their obligations and those who are not afraid of neglecting what they call petty details. In the eyes of God the first are true children of our Institute, good Sisters of Notre Dame; the latter are unfaithful children giving only bad example. This ought to make you enter into yourselves to see whether you are among the unfaithful. On the day of judgement I shall be surrounded by those whose law was the perfect observance of the holy rule and who, on that account were good religious. But I will not recognise as my children those Sisters of Notre Dame who had no esteem for their holy rule and did not regulate their life by it. Where will those neglectful sisters find themselves? Alas! they will be among the foolish virgins. Not having lived for God alone by keeping their holy rule, they will not deserve to form part of the Institute in heaven, since they have not honoured it by their fidelity while upon earth.

2. Fidelity to the rule requires constant self denial

The good God does not ask great sacrifices of us every day in religion. He has pity on our weakness. But he does exact every day continual small sacrifices, nameless acts of self denial imposed by fidelity to the holy rule; such as punctuality to every duty, and the exact observance of the least customs in use in the Institute. God very often derives great glory from our generosity in a succession of little sacrifices which, in our kind of life, link themselves together day after day, even hour by hour, and make us strong in fidelity to grace. Never let us grow weary of obeying the holy rule in its slightest detail. Rather let us seize with holy avidity all the precious occasions of mortification which the holy rule offers. A Sister of Notre Dame must place all her glory in being punctilious about the perfect observance of her rule and in studying the spirit of our holy Institute, in order to be entirely penetrated therewith. She will not succeed in doing this without using great simplicity and openness of heart towards her superior, who will guide her in the work of perfection through the perfect accomplishment of the holy rule.

3. Meditation on the holy rule

My dear sisters, often meditate upon the obligations imposed on you by the perfection demanded of us by our holy rule, then you will be able to say with the psalmist: "Oh, how I loved thy law, O Lord. It is my meditation all the day. I have inclined my heart to do thy justifications forever. Therefore have I loved thy commandments above gold and the topaz" (Ps.118:97, 112, 127).

It is indeed in this way that a Sister of Notre Dame ought to love, respect and keep her holy rule. We ought always to have it present to our minds so as never to stray from it. We must carry it in our hearts with love and practise it with courage because for us it is our only means of glorifying God.

We may also encourage ourselves by the thought of the unfading crown which will be the reward of our efforts to keep our holy rule well, since it interprets for us the holy will of God. Meditation on the holy rule ought to be our first care in the early morning, we must ask our Lord during the time of prayer for grace to keep it well, and rejoice more at being subject to our rule than if we wore the

richest crown on earth. Lastly, we ought to practise it with love springing from the bottom of our heart.

4. Joy results from fidelity to the holy rule

We ought, like the psalmist, to taste and see the happiness that is ours in belonging to the good God. Let us cry out as he did, in a transport of joy, "My lines are fallen to me in goodly places" (Ps.15:6). The portion of my inheritance by my vocation to the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame is goodly to me. How much we ought to appreciate and cherish an inheritance so holy and so good. How advantageous it is to us. May God, in his great goodness, deign to open our eyes that we may understand the greatness of the choice he has deigned to make of us, poor miserable creatures that we are. Let us bless him again and again for subjecting us to a rule so holy. Let us embrace it with love, bind ourselves to it, be faithful to it. Let us stir ourselves up by faith, for faith shows us that the rule was inspired by God himself to teach us how we can glorify him in the most perfect way, to help us to sanctify every step we take, our will, our every action, and to guide our inmost feelings. What a happiness to obey a rule so holy. Let us love it; let us reproduce it perfectly in our lives, so that, at the hour of death, we may be able to say: "I fear nothing: I have lived faithful to the holy rule; I come to you, my God, with humble trust".

XII : ON THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN

The particular examen is one of the most powerful helps towards self conquest and for triumphing, little by little, over self because it directs our attention to one particular fault and to the acquiring of some one virtue, thereby helping us to see easily why we fall and what is the best remedy. By the Examen more than by any other means, we learn to know ourselves. Among the many different inclinations of the human heart, there will always be found one which is dearer to us than the others, and this is called the predominant passion. It is this that we ought to take for the subject of our particular examen. If we devote ourselves earnestly to overcoming this fault we shall be able, by the grace of God, to transform our whole nature, as did St. Ignatius, the Founder of the Society of Jesus. Though of a naturally fiery temperament, he became, by dint of self conquest, so gentle and affable, that people used to think he was naturally calm and sweet tempered. We do not imitate this great saint in our struggle against our evil inclinations - but rather, with King David, we say: "O Lord, ask of me any sacrifice you will, but leave me my Absalom".

A Sister of Notre Dame must give herself to God without reserve; anything less than this would be unworthy of God, whom she has chosen for her divine spouse.

XIII : ON THE PREDOMINANT PASSION

1. Necessity of conquering the predominant passion

My dear sisters, some time ago I spoke to you of the grandeur of our holy vocation; today I propose to say something about the predominant passion. But before I begin, I want to tell you how much consolation you gave me by the simple way in which you spoke to me in the little notes you wrote. I promise you, in our Lord's name, that if you will but work hard, you will advance very quickly in the way of perfection. You must not imagine that you will attain this at once; on the contrary, you will meet with many difficulties and poor human nature will suffer much, for it costs much to let oneself be fashioned to sanctity. But take good heart, you will be holy in time, for your dispositions are

good. Above all, never be discouraged, but humble yourself quite simply when you have not done as well as usual; then ask God's help and begin again.

There are some people who expect everything to be done immediately they begin to try and if this does not happen, they throw the blame on their character and say they will never be any different. It is the devil who inspires this way of reasoning, for God always gives sufficient strength, courage and humility. He knows so well all our weakness and all our shortcomings. I know that some characters have more difficulties than others, for in a community, and even in a family, all are not alike. Some are exceedingly vivacious, some inclined to self indulgence, others so given to self love that they cannot bear the least trifle. However, notwithstanding these different characters, God knows well how to make saints when souls let him act, and bring sincere good will and humility of heart. Courage, my dear sisters, the good God has great graces in store for you. Work at your perfection with your whole heart; I am quite prepared to help you in this task of slaying Goliath, that is the predominant passion, which we so often avoid acknowledging even to ourselves.

2. Need of diligence in overcoming the predominant passion

My dear sisters, we have not yet exhausted all that has to be said on the subject of the predominant passion. I propose, therefore, to speak to you about it again today. You have surely already prayed fervently for light to know what your predominant failing is, for without the light of the Holy Spirit you will never succeed in putting your finger on the spot, and you will never be able to conquer it. This fault does not always appear exteriorly; more often than not it remains in the depths of the soul and only shows itself on special occasions. It is like the worm which eats away the heart of a good apple. The fruit loses its freshness and it is not apparent why this happens. Later on when the apple falls from its branch and lies on the earth, it is seen that a tiny worm has been the cause of the deterioration, and has completely spoilt the fruit.

In the same way, a predominant passion makes us commit many faults and disturbs the peace of our soul. But because we do not try to discover the source and cause of these faults, we do not distinguish what our predominant passion is until it has caused us a serious fall. Endeavour to find out the chief cause of your faults, and do not be afraid of owning to yourself what it is. I know you well enough to tell you if you have discovered it aright, and to tell you myself what it is, should you make a mistake. More than this, I have the consolation of being able to do you justice in feeling sure that there is not one among you who is not anxious to advance in perfection, in order to glorify God and to help in saving souls. Were I to ask you one after the other, you would all say: "Yes, yes, Ma Mère, that is how I feel. Whatever the cost I want to become a good Sister of Notre Dame".

Work at that, my dear sisters, work at that, and soon the task will be accomplished, and the good God will be pleased because he will be glorified in you and through you.

XIV : ON TEMPTATION

Our Lord deigned to be tempted in the desert in order to teach man that life on earth is never exempt from temptation, and to show religious, both men and women who want to live detached from the vanities of the world, especially those who, like the Sisters of Notre Dame, instruct children and young people, that their temptations will be stronger than those experienced by others.

Our Lord also wished to teach us that, following his example, we must fight tenaciously and perseveringly until the devil is overcome. Our weapons must be mental and vocal prayer and great

confidence in God, to whom we should surrender ourselves without letting any temptation disturb our peace of soul. These are the means prescribed by the rule of the Sisters of Notre Dame for overcoming temptation.

However great our suffering may be, we should never let any trace of struggle appear outwardly. Rather should we rejoice in times of trial and temptation, because then we have something to suffer in union with our divine master who suffered so much for us. To suffer in silence gives proof of a truly Christian spirit.

In order to become good Sisters of Notre Dame we must certainly be tried by many temptations. We shall not be fit to promote the greater glory of God and help in saving souls unless we pass through the furnace of tribulation. That is the only means of becoming worthy of our vocation and advancing in solid virtue.

XV : LENT AND THE SPIRIT OF MORTIFICATION

1. The necessity of mortification

The holy season of Lent is a time of grace and mercy. Let us make good use of this time, my dear sisters, for it is a time when the good God takes pleasure in opening to us without reserve the treasures of his grace. Let us ask God particularly for an interior spirit. He will give it to us if we ask aright, for I repeat, Lent is a time when God allows himself to be easily touched, when his mercy is abundant so that he bestows all sorts of graces: graces of perfection for ourselves and of conversion for sinners whom, by our calling, we must bring back to God, since our Institute is founded to save souls.

2. Meditation on the Passion of our Lord

If we strive to become spiritually minded, if we watch well over our eyes, tongue and ears in order to occupy ourselves entirely with God, we shall always find matter to meditate upon during this holy season of Lent, and we shall make great progress in the spirit of prayer. Through interior recollection we shall be disposed to reflect upon the mysteries of the sacred passion of our divine master. What treasures will you not find hidden there, my dear sisters, when prostrate before your crucifix, you recall the humiliations, the sufferings of God-made-man, who for love of us, willed to spend thirty-three years in the most painful exercise of rigorous interior and exterior penance having always before his eyes the suffering he had still to undergo and the cruel tortures by which his laborious life was brought to an end.

Religious who devote themselves to meditating upon the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ will derive great fruit therefrom, especially during Lent when holy Church endeavours in a very special way to recall to the minds of her children, the remembrance of the sufferings of her divine head. With how much more reason, then, does she desire that the privileged spouses of our Lord should be penetrated with sympathy for him when he sees faithful souls meditating on his sufferings, on all he did to save the world, and especially when he sees how, as good Sisters of Notre Dame we enter into the feelings of his adorable heart by applying his sufferings to souls and sharing in his spirit of self immolation by our devotedness to his greater glory and to the salvation of souls.

3. Our spirit should be that of the Church

In conformity with the spirit of the Church we ought, during the holy time of Lent to occupy ourselves exclusively with the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then is the time to imitate his example and to fill up in ourselves what is wanting to the passion of Christ (Col.1:24). The good God shows us what is wanting, what we must add to the passion of our Lord in order to cooperate with our divine spouse in the work of redemption. This is what he asks us to do and suffer in the exercise of our holy calling. Like our divine model, we must promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls by walking in his footsteps, that is, by carrying our cross with a courage and perseverance which never fails. My dear sisters, let us not leave our divine saviour alone in the desert and on the road to Calvary. Let us, guided as he was by the Holy Spirit, go with him into the desert. The desert to which the Holy Spirit will lead us is an interior solitude where amid the most varied occupations we shall be alone with God. Here we must converse with God alone, and by this intimate intercourse put ourselves into a fit state to receive all the graces which are offered to us during the holy season of Lent; graces for ourselves, for the souls specially entrusted to us, and for the entire world. In order to live in this interior solitude we must mortify all our senses, renounce our own will, fast from all self love, and from our own judgement, in a word, we must sacrifice all that binds us to self or to creatures, all that hinders us from belonging entirely and exclusively to God so that in everything we may seek him alone.

4. Daily fidelity, an excellent penance

Our Lord in the gospel does not ask us to do great things to obtain the kingdom of heaven. The love he has for us and his knowledge of our weakness, made him promise heaven to those who are faithful in little things and who let no little occasion of mortification escape them, for instance suppressing a quick retort or a feeling of resentment at some little preference bestowed upon another. Let us apply ourselves specially to keeping guard over our senses. This practice is so necessary that without it, it is impossible for a soul to secure salvation still less to reach perfection. There is need of extreme vigilance over oneself to preserve the purity of heart God exacts of us. How many graces does he not shower upon a soul who seeks him in simplicity of heart by the practice of continual mortification of the senses.

Unless exterior and interior mortification are united, mental prayer is an impossibility as well as all progress in the spiritual life. We cannot acquire solid virtue without self denial. There is everything to fear for religious who do not mortify themselves. Far from advancing in perfection, they lead only tepid, careless inconstant lives. Such a soul may well fear that our Lord will vomit her out of his mouth, as he himself expresses it, and she runs great risk of losing her vocation through her own fault.

5. The penances proper to a Sister of Notre Dame

The mortifications which a Sister of Notre Dame ought to practise do not consist in great bodily macerations, long vigils, rigorous fasts. Their characteristic lies in the mortification of the passions; for example, by repressing a quick retort, keeping back a word which would wound, accepting a humiliation, causing self will to die, uprooting it and completely breaking it. Mortification is the sister of mental prayer. But we must not be satisfied with denying ourselves in little things, we must direct this spirit of mortification against our predominant fault, turn it against pride, sensuality, slothfulness and so on. If we do not do this, we shall act like Saul. God had commanded him, by the mouth of Samuel, to destroy the Amalekites, sparing none on account of their age or sex, not even the domestic animals. Saul, against the will of the Lord, spared King Agag, and punishment followed. We act like this sometimes in our mortifications. We give up what does not cost us very much, but we will not kill Agag. So long as we practise reserve in this manner, we shall never

advance in the spiritual life. We ought to deal strong blows at our predominant passion, and then we should easily overcome it. Then God will take the place of the Agag we have destroyed.

During the holy time of Lent we ought to apply ourselves to mortification in order that the spirit of penance may penetrate our souls in a practical way.

Our sole occupation, while meditating on the passion of our loving saviour ought to be to unite ourselves to him to subdue our passions, and to beg of our Lord to turn away from the world the punishments it deserves for all the crimes committed during the days immediately preceding this holy season. Let us implore our Lord to enlighten with a ray of his divine light those unhappy souls who offend God, because they know him not.

6. Words addressed to the sisters by Mère Julie after collation on Good Friday, 1815

My dear sisters, on this day and at this hour on the first Good Friday did our Lady take her evening meal? I have been thinking that few people think of the sufferings of the blessed virgin. And yet those who thus honour her receive great graces. Let us picture to ourselves Mary, our loving mother, returning from the burial of her divine son. Note her immense grief as she walks with St. John.

After the sad events on Mount Calvary, she may well say: "O all you who pass by, see if there is any sorrow like mine". To understand our Lady's sorrows, one's love must be as great as hers. At that moment was accomplished Simeon's prophecy: "Your own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2:35). Why are we not like Mary, pierced with a sword of sorrow? Because we do not love as she loved. Let us stir up our love and then we shall be better able to understand how much she suffered. (At these words Mère Julie seemed transported with love). My dear sisters, let us each examine our conscience and see what fruit we have gained from the multitude of graces showered upon us.

Is it not true that we still live for ourselves and are still full of pride? No sooner does anything annoy us than we kick like stags, and seek all kinds of excuses. We nurse our grievances, and several days pass before we get over them.

One's superior is inadequate to the situation; the confessor is required before peace of soul is restored. My dear sisters, all this ought to make us ashamed. But there is no reason for discouragement - quite the contrary. What must be done? We must throw ourselves with still greater confidence into the arms of our divine saviour; bury ourselves alive with him in the tomb, in order to rise again with him to lead a completely new life.

XVI : ON THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE

1. On interior mortification

My dear sisters, it is true that the penances which we inflict on our body may satisfy God for our sins, and turn aside the divine wrath enkindled against sinners. But try to realise that your practices of penance are only efficacious in so far as they are accompanied interiorly by a penitential spirit and performed according to obedience, for from holy obedience springs all the merit of our good works. Were you to fast like anchorites, to sleep on a bed of ashes, to discipline yourself to blood, all this would be of no avail for gaining heaven unless it was accomplished with interior

mortification, and directed by the holy will of God, that is to say, by your superiors.

But what you can always do without special permission and what you ought to do is to discipline your self will, to make your judgement fast from too frequent criticism, and to make your sensitiveness content with the hard bed of common life, when it would prefer to soften down the many little hardships incident to holy poverty. My good daughters, try to be pre-eminent in this interior spirit of penance. The good God is constantly asking this of each one of us.

2. The special penances of a Sister of Notre Dame

These are the penances which all Sisters of Notre Dame are bound to perform:

Obedience - death to one's own will and judgement. Punctuality at all community exercises, and in the fulfilment of one's duties. These are the discipline, the hair shirt and the rigorous fast of all Sisters of Notre Dame. They must besides have great courage and trust in God. With these weapons we can vanquish all the devils in hell. A sister well versed in wielding these arms is capable of inspiring terror into demons and of appearing before the cruellest of tyrants.

3. On forbearance

My good sisters, the reading made at table is enough to put to confusion those amongst us who imagine themselves to be exempt from the duty of doing penance. True, our vocation does not admit of our performing great austerities like those practised in early times by the saints - the wearing of hair shirts, or disciplining ourselves with iron chains. The use of a few instruments of penance is allowed us and we must be faithful to these in order to maintain the spirit of fervour and compunction. But for us there is another kind of penance which can be practised every day and every hour of the day. We let thousands of occasions of practising it escape us, yet for us, it would perfectly supply for the use of those instruments of penance which are incompatible with our other duties. My good sisters, self can be put to death all day long. In the practice of holy obedience, for example, our superior tells us to do something which we do not like; instead of listening to what our repugnance suggests, let us play a trick upon ourselves by making a fervent act of love and then set about doing what we have to do, as if it were a pleasure to perform it, acting thus through pure love of God and in a spirit of penance. In the refectory something is served which is distasteful - conquer self and do an act of mortification without letting anyone see even a hint of what it costs us. The best mortifications are those of which God alone holds the secret, that is, of course, provided that the dish set before us does not really disagree with us. If what is actually served makes us ill, we must pray about the matter and then submit the decision to our superior. But be on your guard, my good daughters. Do not take too great care of the body. Remember, we are religious and sometimes it is not our health, but an immortalised spirit which makes us suffer.

Another fertile source of mortification is often met with in our charge. Perhaps we have to work with a sister whose character irritates us, her way of looking at things, her spirit, everything about her is radically opposed to our own disposition. She is, in fact, rather a hindrance than a help, and continually causes us annoyance. What is to be done? It is here that the spirit of penance comes in and finds matter to offer as a holocaust to God. My good daughters, a Sister of Notre Dame will rejoice at this good fortune which enables her to practise at the same time both humility and charity. She loves the sister in question from a supernatural motive and will prefer being in charge with her rather than with anyone else; she will pray for her and never let her feel that she finds any difficulty in getting on with her.

Those who are faithful to grace in circumstances like this, and in many others of a like nature which are constantly occurring in our vocation, ought to thank the good God for giving them the spirit of penance proper to our holy Institute.

4. Penance through obedience

Love of penance and the spirit of mortification are absolutely necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame, for she makes profession of imitating our saviour who only came upon earth in order to suffer and to die at last on the cross. A faithful spouse must tread the same path her heavenly bridegroom traversed during his mortal life. She ought to love suffering, to go in search of it, seeking only the death of self love and of her own judgement and inclinations. She must destroy and allow to be destroyed in herself, all that is not of God, for her heart ought to be ever immolated to him as a victim.

Nevertheless my good daughters, a Sister of Notre Dame who thinks that she ought to tread the road to Calvary by inflicting on herself all sorts of corporal penances which weaken her health, makes a great mistake. Certain penances are allowed us by our superiors, but the greatest penance of a Sister of Notre Dame consists in lifelong and interior renunciation of self, complete submission of her own self will and judgement and perfect subjection to the will of superiors who hold the place of God in her regard.

Penance such as this, my dear sisters, is not easy. It puts to death our inmost self, and makes of our entire being a holocaust well pleasing to God, a holocaust which he accepts the more gladly because self love has no part in it. Indeed neither self love nor vanity can find anything to feed upon in such penance as this. The good God alone is witness of these interior struggles and victories which secure at the same time both the glory of God, and perfect forgetfulness of self.

XVII : THE WAY OF THE CROSS **THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN**

1. Love of the cross

My dear sisters, I would not have you ignorant of the many difficulties which are to be met with in our vocation. We should greatly deceive ourselves if we thought that in religious life we ought to be exempt from sufferings and crosses. On the contrary, we enter religion in order to seek them, but they are of a different kind from the crosses which people in the world have to bear. Our crosses do not disturb our peace of soul because we lovingly embrace them.

When, in good faith, we welcome the cross, God gives us strength to bear it and sweetens its bitterness by his holy grace. There are not two ways of going to heaven, my dear sisters, but only ONE - the way of the cross, the way of sufferings, afflictions, and humiliations. Our Lord has shown us the way, clearing the path for us; by passing first, he has smoothed its difficulties. True Sisters of Notre Dame must walk with generous hearts in the footsteps of their divine master. The cross is the key which opens heaven to ourselves and to many others. If, like the saints, we were firmly convinced of the advantage of suffering, we should be greedy of crosses and when God offers us one, no matter in what way or through whom, we should rejoice, as did the saints, at being found worthy to suffer something for God's sake.

2.No cross, no crown

Suffering is an efficacious remedy against the devil, our mortal enemy, who constantly strives to tyrannise over us. Suffering souls are the support of the Institute. Our Lord never leaves a soul he loves without some cross. True happiness can only be found in bearing one's cross with our Lord Jesus Christ; be it interior suffering of mind and heart, temptations and desolation or exterior sickness, trouble, and humiliations; all these things are very good because they make us more like our Lord and unite us more closely to him.

We must know how to keep silence when we suffer, for if we seek relief and consolation from creatures, we are no longer following our blessed Lord. Moreover, we are the spouses of God-made-man who suffered from the time of his birth until his death upon the cross; whose life was one continual act of self immolation. We are unworthy Sisters of Notre Dame if we have no wish to suffer, or if we give way to discouragement as soon as God sees fit to test our fidelity by sending us some cross. If we would be of the number of those who will gaze upon our Lord face to face in his glory, we must first climb with him the hill of Calvary.

3.Love of the cross necessary to all Sisters of Notre Dame

An essential element is required in our communities, my dear sisters, namely love of the cross and true self abnegation. I often notice with pain that when a little sacrifice or humiliation presents itself a sister evades if instead of going out to meet and embrace it, as would a true follower of Jesus Christ. What strikes me and grieves me most is that I see you approaching the holy table so often without my being able to note any change in your conduct or seeing you grow in the spirit of our Lord by a life of real self abnegation. Sometimes I say: "My God, my God, what are you going to do with souls like these?" But you know, my dear daughters, that when a room is full of all sorts of things, there is no place on which to sit down. Similarly when our hearts are full of trifles, full of ourselves, full of anything and everything except God, you cannot expect that he will abide within us. I do not say that communions made in these dispositions are sacrilegious, but they are made without sufficient fruit. It is quite certain that if we make proper use of our communions, we should become as strong as lions. It was to obtain fortitude like this that the early Christians and the saints, before going to martyrdom, strengthened themselves with this heavenly bread; and we, no sooner do we come out of chapel after having received holy communion, than we fall at the least difficulty, like a snowflake before the wind.

XVIII : ON THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND SPIRITUAL CONFESSION

Those who often approach the sacrament of penance ought to pay great attention to moving their hearts to contrition, even to perfect contrition, in order to obtain forgiveness for their sins and an increase of purity of conscience. Often very little fruit is reaped from a sacrament so well fitted to draw us nearer to God, for purity attracts God to a soul and detains him there. We draw but little fruit because we spend too much time in examination of conscience and pulling ourselves to pieces. This is to occupy ourselves with self instead of with God, rather ought we to stir up in our hearts sincere and perfect sorrow for the faults of which we have been guilty. God delights in a humble and contrite heart, but when we are so busy examining ourselves, it often happens that contrition is neglected, and contrition is an essential part of the sacrament. If it is perfect it suffices to wash away any imperfections we may have committed and which have escaped us in our accusation. I counsel you to ask our Lord every day for the grace of perfect contrition. It sometimes happens that a long

time elapses without our being able to go to confession, owing to the great dearth of priests, consequent on the terrible revolution. A religious who is so deprived of sacramental confession, can make her confession spiritually in the following manner:

Profoundly humbled at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ in the sacred tabernacle and believing firmly that he is there present in his sacred humanity, she will accuse herself to him as to her confessor, of all her faults.

Then she will excite in her heart a lively sorrow for her ingratitude towards so good a God. She will take care to apply her sorrow especially to her predominant failing, and she will express her grief for it in these words:

"O my God, prostrate before your adorable majesty, I humbly beg pardon for the abuse I have made of so many graces, and for all my sins which I sincerely detest. Deign to cleanse my soul from all these stains and to pardon me through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Then, my dear sisters, we should enter into ourselves and see, in bitterness of soul though in profound peace, all the faults and imperfections we have committed since God did us the honour of choosing us as his spouses. What a thought! What subject for prayer! What abundant matter for meditation!

XIX : ON TEPIDITY

1. Signs of Tepidity

There are few communities in which there are not some tepid and relaxed souls. Never give up the practice of the little penances which you have permission to do, or of the customary acts of humility, because fervour is maintained by these means and though they are not of obligation, the soul begins to lose ground when they are neglected.

My dear sisters, we know we are growing relaxed and tepid in God's service when we dispense ourselves without necessity and without permission from our spiritual exercises. Conduct like this shows that God is no longer the principle of all your actions; that you no longer seek him directly, your heart no longer seeks him eagerly because it distracts itself with creatures or with self. Never let us turn away from God to occupy ourselves with self, for this downward path leads quickly to relaxation and carries us too far.

2. The consequences of tepidity

A tepid soul finds herself in a state of blindness, of spiritual torpor consequent on the continual want of recollection in which she lives, which prevents her from entering into herself. Many venial faults are committed because such a soul withdraws herself from the help of grace. Continued resistance to interior inspirations causes spiritual blindness, and results in the formation of a false conscience, though this may be disguised by frequent reception of the sacraments. Such a soul is dormant, as it were, in an habitual state of venial sin, though she disguises this to herself because she has neither the will, nor the courage to correct her faults. What makes this state still more dangerous and what in some sort obliges Jesus Christ to reject a tepid soul from his divine heart is the fact that for such a soul there is almost no hope of amendment. A tepid soul does not commit grave sins, but falls very

often into interior faults within her own heart. Then, her conscience being no longer delicate, such faults are easily overlooked in the examination of conscience, whereas, in a soul anxious to please God they would be noticed at once.

My dear sisters, never will I tolerate a tepid soul among us. I cannot allow carelessness and indifference in the service of the good God. We must serve God with holy joy and true vigour of soul because the good God is so good, and because he has loved us with a love of predilection by calling us to our holy Institute.

3. The evils of tepidity

Tepidity begins by getting into a state of imperfection, wherein a religious places obstacles to the designs God has upon her by infidelity to the touch of the Holy Spirit upon her soul. She neglects what grace shows her as most perfect, and refuses to give the sollicitations of grace the preference over those of nature. This is a great misfortune, for God desires to form for himself from among us, souls who are generous, fervent and magnanimous, occupied wholly in the salvation of other souls. Do not let us grieve his adorable heart by offering ourselves to him as cowardly spouses, who bear his yoke unwillingly; here are the signs by which we shall know whether or not we are tepid:

- i. Small desire of spiritual advancement;
- ii. Little sorrow for the infidelities of which we know ourselves guilty;
- iii. Not enough fear and horror of venial sin;
- iv. Great repugnance in overcoming ourselves.

XX : ON THE LOVE OF GOD

1. Apostolic work - a reward for love

Is there anything to be compared to the love of the good God for us? God has thought of me from all eternity. Each one of us is present to his omniscience; he has chosen us from among many others to raise us to the height of apostolic perfection. He disdained not to cast his eyes upon us, poor ignorant women, devoid of knowledge and talent. That was also how he acted with regard to his apostles. God chooses simple and ignorant young girls to be his spouses, his beloved daughters, his servants of predilection, his labourers who shall work in his vineyard in order to gain for him souls ransomed at the price of his most precious blood. Yes, my dearest daughters, we have been called to all that. If we are faithful to our holy Institute, we are called to share in the great work of saving souls. Let us try to become worthy of this task by submitting humbly, in heart and mind, to those whom God has chosen from all eternity, to lead us to himself by this sublime path.

2. Love must be generous

Our love of God ought to be generous. It is not enough to love God only now and then, or at intervals, as for example, while we are experiencing consolation. No, true love of God makes us love him always and at all times, in dryness and desolation as well as in the sweetness of sensible

consolation.

Very many souls make a mistake about this; they think that true devotion consists in having a relish for prayer. The opposite is the truth. The more we suffer, the more we show our love of God, if we remain faithful to our meditation and to all the duties of religion. True love of God is shown when we serve him with justice, fortitude and humility.

XXI : ON HOLY COMMUNION

1. Holy communion helps us to become holy

Holiness does not consist in making many communions, but in making them well, so that fruit may be drawn from them. We must follow the advice of the apostle who says: "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice" (1 Cor.11:28). It is certain that the little fruit we derive from holy communion is due to want of preparation. The thought of holy communion ought to be the soul of our life; it ought to help us to sacrifice everything for God; that is the 'proving' that ought to precede the reception of holy communion.

Too often, some of us only go to communion because we see others doing so, or approach the holy table only because it is the appointed day. This gives rise to routine, and all progress in perfection is hindered. To advance in the spiritual life it is necessary to make our communions well. On the eve of communion days we should ask ourselves: "What progress have I made in humility, charity, and mortification? How have I advanced in self denial and union with God since my last communion?" By this means it is evident at once what fruit should be gathered from the next communion. It is quite certain that anyone who prepares herself like this will soon make great progress and will quickly die to self so that God alone may live within her.

2. A spirit of detachment should result from our communions

Holy communion can only produce its fruit in a soul just in so far as that soul is detached from self, and has her heart empty of creatures, for the God whom we receive is a jealous God, who cannot make his home in a soul taken up with trifles and for a Sister of Notre Dame all that is not God is a mere trifle.

Do not let us incur the responsibility of one fruitless communion. We need not feel sweetness and consolation, but we must have that faith which enlarges the heart, for our blessed Lord leaves behind him in a well prepared soul greater humility and charity, a more generous spirit of devotedness and self sacrifice. Dear sisters, I beg of you in the name of God, always to live in a manner befitting those who nourish themselves upon God, and who prepare to do so again. May the holy Eucharist become the principle and end of all our actions. The fruit of a life of continual preparation for holy communion and of thanksgiving for this great favour will be to make us so little that everyone may trample us underfoot, and at the same time it will make us so great and large hearted that through God's strength acting in us, we shall overcome all obstacles to the promotion of his glory and salvation of souls. Another fruit of such a life is to keep unceasingly in hand the knife of circumcision in order to destroy with it all self love, so that we may follow yet more closely our Lord Jesus Christ, poor humbled despised and counted as the last and least of the children of men.

3. Our Lord asks for our undivided love

Holy communion is for us:

- 1.the principle of all true greatness;
- 2.the principle of all holiness.

When a soul feeds upon God, that soul carries within itself the principle of true greatness. We must be great enough to feel ourselves superior to all the false grandeur of the world. When we think that we have within us the God who created the world, when we have the happiness of being united with our Lord Jesus Christ, would it not be a lowering and degrading of our dignity to attach ourselves to anything except God alone, or to let ourselves be taken up with any creature whatsoever?

The same God who said: "Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy", the very same God has made himself our food. He dwells within us and says: "My spouse, my beloved, do not profane my sanctity by anything inordinate in your thoughts or conduct. Sin is hateful to me, even imperfections displease me. If it was necessary for you to banish these from your heart in order to receive me, you must also avoid them with the most jealous care in order that I may remain with you. I am your spouse and I only take my delight in hearts that are pure".

4.Devotion to the blessed sacrament

The most solid of all devotions is that to the most blessed sacrament because our Lord Jesus Christ is there body and soul, whole and entire; the same Jesus Christ who is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. As we have the happiness of making our meditation in the presence of the blessed sacrament, we ought to contemplate all the mysteries of our Lord's life as actually present to us, since our Lord continues to immolate himself upon the altar. Even though we remain cold and seemingly without any thoughts which nourish the soul, we unconsciously, perhaps, feel the influence of the blessed sacrament. Our Lord acts there in a much more efficacious way than when we make our prayer in a private oratory where the blessed sacrament is not reserved. How is it possible for religious to approach the tabernacle with so much indifference, when we ought to abound with love, gratitude and respect for a God who deigns to abase himself under the appearance of a little bread, in order that he may become our food and dwell among us. How little we understand our happiness. The early Christians always wished to have the holy Eucharist with them; that was the secret of their strength. David was always happiest when in the temple of the Lord. Some saints passed the greater part of their life in Church, it was torment to them to leave the blessed sacrament. We cannot remain bodily present before the altar in our apostolic vocation which calls us to our schools. But to faith there are no walls. When we are beneath the same roof with our Lord and obedience keeps us away from chapel, we live in the spirit of adoration.

We must never cease from mental prayer in the presence of our Lord in the blessed sacrament because we are dry and weary. On the contrary, if we love our Lord very much we shall be content to suffer in his presence silently and for love of him.

5.Preparation and thanksgiving for holy communion

What are the principal dispositions we must excite in ourselves when we prepare for holy communion?

- i.We must practise great detachment from the things of earth.

ii. We must stir up in ourselves a great desire of growing in divine love.

We must begin, then, by getting rid of every attachment, by banishing from our heart everything that is not God, and God alone. All inordinate earthly affection, every imperfection displeasing to God, for these sully the soul and hinder the precious effects of holy communion. Our Lord can only do in us what we will let him do. When St. Gertrude asked our Lord what dispositions he desired to see in her when she approached the holy table, he replied: "Come to receive me with a heart empty of self".

The desire of growing in the love of God produces a great longing to receive our Lord.

Bring to your minds the need of this desire by recalling the words of the Magnificat, where our Lady says: "He has filled the hungry with good things". Indeed, our Lord only came into this world after he had been desired for many centuries, and he feels great repugnance to entering a heart which has no desire to receive him, and which does not therefore satisfy his burning love and immense desire of giving himself to us. This desire he made known to St. Mechtild when he said to her: "Bees do not seek the flowers for their honey more eagerly than I earnestly desire to give myself lovingly to souls in my sacrament of love".

Our thanksgiving must also be made with great recollection and great care. There is no prayer more agreeable to God and more useful to the soul than that made as thanksgiving after holy communion. That is why holy souls take great care to spend as much time as they can in this holy exercise.

We shall derive the greatest possible profit from our Lord's visit if we imagine we hear him saying, as once he did to his disciples: "You will not always have me with you". During these precious moments let us endeavour to form holy affections, to speak to Jesus of his glory and our misery; let us lay before him all our wants, since St. Teresa says that our Lord, coming into a soul in holy communion, seats himself there as upon a throne of grace saying: "I have come on purpose to shower graces upon you. Ask whatever you will and all your desires shall be satisfied".

6. Holy communion increases our spirit of faith

We must approach holy communion with a great spirit of faith. We ought often to meditate on the words in which our Lord tells us that it is himself who is concealed beneath the frail appearance of the sacred host. What a marvellous saying; and it is infallibly true because it is our Lord Jesus Christ who said it. We must ask God during our prayer for the grace of understanding in a practical way the life we ought to live, seeing that God has made himself our food, and lives and acts in us.

In thinking about holy communion we ought also to be deeply penetrated with a sentiment of profound humility, the abasement of our whole being. We should recognise ourselves as creatures utterly unworthy of such a favour, and this humility must not be a matter of words only; we must be really humble in heart and mind.

XXII : ON THE HOLY PRESENCE OF GOD

1. Remembrance of God's presence helps the supernatural life

My dear sisters, we shall come to the knowledge of ourselves and of the spirit of our holy Institute by

the constant remembrance of the presence of God. Without this you can do nothing to make yourselves pleasing to God, or to become useful for his glory in the holy calling you have embraced; in fact, it is knowledge of God combined with knowledge of self which has made all the saints. This twofold knowledge made them so watchful over themselves that they avoided even the least shadow of fault.

In their meditations, after pondering on the holiness of God to whose service they were pledged, they turned to contemplate the depths of their own misery and corruption. They always tried to remember the holy presence of God, knowing well that his divine glance would stimulate their efforts to preserve perfect purity in heart and mind.

Besides this, the practice of remembering the presence of God gives strength, counsel and support in difficulties. God never loses sight of a soul who keeps herself in his holy presence and who, in all she does, seeks only to please him.

2. A means of attaining sanctity

The best means of keeping the holy rule faithfully is always to live in the holy presence of God. My good daughters, St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure certainly knew secrets of which we are ignorant about walking in the divine presence, and that is what made them find so much ease and sweetness in this intimate converse with God, that they recked nothing of what was going on around them unless it was connected with his glory.

In spite of her manifold duties, a good Sister of Notre Dame will hear God saying those words of the Song of Songs: "Arise, make haste, my love ... my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall" (Song of Songs 2:10, 14), and then, my good daughters, you will hide yourselves in spirit in the sacred wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ, in that divine heart in which every member of this Institute ought to establish her abode, where all will find an assured refuge in trouble, and unflinching strength to support their weakness. In the sacred heart all can draw true zeal for souls from its purest source and thus united to Jesus they will be certain of doing solid good to souls and of giving much glory to God.

Let us exercise ourselves in this practice of remembering the presence of God and, like the saints, we shall under the influence of God's holy presence, spend pure, detached and fervent lives.

3. Silence necessary to recollection

My good daughters, often call to mind the word God spoke to Abraham: "Walk before me and be perfect" (Gen.17:1). Oh, what a beautiful virtue is this remembrance of the presence of God. You must work with all your heart to acquire it, for attention to God's presence renders a soul fit to receive his most intimate communications. Its practice makes a soul advance with great strides in the hidden and interior life - that life hidden with Christ in God which gives to those who are familiar with it a taste of God's sweetest consolations, even in the midst of the weariness and crucifixion entailed by the accomplishment of his adorable will. Such a soul as this is silent; she cares nothing for importunate intercourse with creatures; she lends herself to it, it is true, when necessity requires, but she never gives herself up to it. While duty obliges her to be busy with the children confided to her care, she keeps the inward eye of her soul constantly fixed on God. "God sees me", she says to herself, "he notes all I do, he weighs in his balance every act I perform, he knows my most secret thoughts". Ah, my good daughters, let us make our own that expression of the holy patriarchs: "The Lord in whose sight I walk" (Gen.24:40) (8). Could we, under the very eye of God, do anything of which he would not approve, or say even so much as one word which would displease him? Oh, no,

dear children, if we lived in remembrance of God's holy presence we should always try to be specially pleasing to our heavenly Father, we should willingly sacrifice something that would bring him less glory, for that which would bring him more. These thoughts springing from remembrance of the presence of God, so penetrated the saints that they became aflame with love which urged them to the practice of heroic virtue and self sacrifice. Sisters of Notre Dame should be ready for great sacrifices, if they would be worthy of their vocation, and help in saving souls, many souls; they ought to surpass everyone else in self abnegation and love.

4. Remembrance of God's presence necessary to a Sister of Notre Dame

Giddy and frivolous minded people are not fit for the apostolic life. Very young girls like a certain amount of distraction, and at that time of life a little giddiness is only natural, but as soon as you come to know the sublime office to which you are called by your divine master, dear daughters, you must correct this lightness of character. The best means to do this quickly and well is to strive to keep in the holy presence of God; to live, act and think as though you saw him present. St. Francis de Sales says that all advance in the spiritual life depends on the practice of keeping oneself in the presence of God. A religious who is attentive to the presence of God does her work perfectly in order to please her divine spouse and in a short time she will acquire that maturity which produces great virtue in the soul and a spirit pleasing to God, who reigns within her as sovereign master. Work at this wholeheartedly, my dear daughters. You are, in a true sense, apostles, and you will only do good to the children confided to your care, those children who look to you for the nourishing bread of Christian doctrine, in so far as you are united to our Lord. This union is best effected by acquiring the habit of consciously living in the holy presence of God.

5. Remembrance of God's presence, a means of attaining perfection

The practice of remembering the presence of God is a helpful means towards performing all our actions for God and for him alone. It is an astonishing fact that we think so little of the presence of the good God, while we are ever present to him, since it is in him, as St. Paul says, "that we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In our deplorable blindness we hardly pay any attention to this, and nevertheless, as formerly to Abraham, the good God says to every Sister of Notre Dame through our holy rule: "Walk before me, and be perfect" (Gen.17:1). If we walked faithfully in the holy presence of God, few if any faults would escape us, and we should soon become perfect, not perhaps with a perfection that never stumbles, for the Holy Spirit tells us that even the just man falls seven times a day, but our faults would be occasions rather of merit than of loss. They would be only faults of frailty, or of surprise, which in no way hinders us from being pleasing to God, or from living in his holy presence.

6. The fruit of this practice is action, not contemplation

My good daughters, try to understand well what is meant by practising the remembrance of the holy presence of God. There is no question of taking up an attitude and posing, as it were, in the presence of God, and remaining there to enjoy its delights to such an extent that you neglect the duties of your state of life. For a Sister of Notre Dame this would be a false and mistaken interpretation, and God would turn away from sisters who wished to remain thus in contemplation of him, forgetting everything else.

God said to Abraham: "Walk ...", that is to say: "Do in my presence the work I have confided to you". The remembrance of God's holy presence ought to be to us a means of serving him more earnestly, while at the same time it inspires us with a holy and filial fear of displeasing him.

That is why Sisters of Notre Dame must have, so to speak, one eye fixed on God attentively contemplating him, while with the other they look at themselves to find out how they must act in order to please him.

7.A help to avoiding sin

It is not difficult to see that the consequence of attentively walking in the presence of God secures great perfection. When we find ourselves in the presence of some one whom we love, fear and respect, we avoid doing anything which might displease that person. In the same way keeping ourselves aware of the presence of God must, of necessity, produce in our hearts a great horror of sin, for sin is the only thing which displeases God. By striving our utmost to keep away from sin, we must needs practise many virtues very agreeable to God whose presence animates our fervour, namely:

HUMILITY OBEDIENCE CHARITY SIMPLICITY

which our Lord so often recommends to us in the holy gospels.

You see then, my good daughters, how very necessary is this remembrance of the presence of God, since it consists chiefly in not letting pass a single opportunity of practising virtue, and in combating that fault which most hinders the reign of God in our heart.

The remembrance of the presence of God leads to true union with our divine Lord, without which we do but barren work. Unless we are closely united with our Lord we shall never do anything of worth in our holy vocation. If while occupied with external work in our classes our hearts are not united with God, we shall produce no fruit in the souls confided to our care. We may instruct them, perhaps, but we shall not be able to form Jesus Christ in their hearts. It is, therefore, of the highest importance that a Sister of Notre Dame should constantly remember the holy presence of God. Without this, it would be in vain that "she rises before the light" (Ps.124).

8.A short cut to perfection

The life of faith means living in remembrance of the holy presence of God, and seeing God in all that happens, to feel oneself guided, as it were, by that divine hand which arranges everything for our greatest good. Dear daughters, if we had but the happiness of seeing only God in all we have to do, and in all that befalls us, what peace should we not enjoy in the midst of even the greatest tribulations, what tranquillity our soul would taste amid all the storms of life.

To walk in God's presence is the means of arriving in a short time at very high perfection. The thought of the presence of God is not sad or gloomy. On the contrary, it makes joy abound in the soul, according to that word of the royal prophet: "I have been delighted in the way of thy testimonies" (Ps.108:14 ff). The remembrance of the presence of God works wonders in the souls of those who listen with docility to his gentle voice, for God communicates himself to those who are attentive to his holy presence. We, Sisters of Notre Dame, will produce no fruit in souls if we do not live this life of intimate converse with God. The good God is with us always. Freely and willingly, therefore, we ought to live always in the presence of our divine master. The remembrance of the presence of God nourishes and increases the love of God in our souls.

XXIII : ON FIDELITY TO GRACE

1. Great fidelity implies great self denial

We are like shadows which never stay in the same place, because in the spiritual life we can never stay as we are: we must either advance or go back. My dear sisters, try to understand this truth well, but above all make good use of it.

On the day of judgement when the good God questions us on the duties of our holy state, on the way in which we have corresponded to our holy vocation as Sisters of Notre Dame, we shall have no excuse to bring if we have not done well the work confided to us by the good God, and shall be obliged to say: "Lord, I have not reached the degree of perfection you expected of me. It was not that the means were wanting. You, O my God, gave me abundance of spiritual nourishment, but I had not the courage to overcome myself sufficiently to trust myself entirely to you."

2. Fresh grace is won by fidelity

Nothing is impossible to a soul who is faithful to grace and trusts wholly in God. But as soon as a religious, through negligence or voluntary infidelity neglects grace or rejects even one seemingly small grace, she turns her soul away from its source so that it becomes exceedingly difficult for her to be good, because God does not give exceptional graces to one who has not made good use of her ordinary graces.

The difficulties to be met with in our holy vocation in attaining the perfection and holiness expected by God of a Sister of Notre Dame ought in no way to discourage us, because in spite of our weakness and incapacity, we can do everything with the help of God's grace. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (Phil.4:13). Nor must we be in a hurry to ask God to deliver us from temptations. Rather should we ask humbly and confidently for the grace of remaining faithful. Ponder the answer our Lord made to St. Paul when this great apostle asked to be delivered from his temptations. Our Lord only said: "My grace is sufficient FOR you." (2 Cor.12:9) and aided by divine grace St. Paul triumphed over all his temptations and trials.

3. The necessity of corresponding with grace

Each one of us has her own measure of grace, sufficient to win her destined place in heaven. But if we resist grace, if we do not correspond faithfully to it, we run great risk of never reaching heaven at all. For a Sister of Notre Dame there is no middle way, for when the good God favours a soul with so great a vocation, showering upon her strong and unusual graces, he is jealous of that soul, and exacts from her unflinching fidelity. Moreover his love never asks any sacrifice for which he does not send an accompanying sufficient grace.

Souls who are the recipients of many and great graces must not pride themselves on this but rather tremble, lest they may not be faithfully corresponding with them. We, dear sisters, we, Sisters of Notre Dame, are among the number of those in whom grace daily abounds. The Lord in his mercy has prevented us by grace, withdrawing us from the corruption of the world, freeing us from temporal cares, showering abundantly upon us grace, light and the help of the Sacraments. My dear daughters, a Sister of Notre Dame who does not profit of so many means of grace, will surely deserve to hear those words of reproach uttered of old to the Jews by God: "What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard, that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring

forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes? And now I will show you what I will do to my vineyard. I will make it desolate; it shall not be pruned, and it shall not be digged; but briers and thorns shall come up." (Is.5:4-6). When a soul abuses God's grace, the Holy Spirit deprives it of his divine inspirations. Ordinary graces are not wanting, but that soul will not receive those special and efficacious graces which go to the making of saints. O Sacred Heart of my good Jesus, never let a Sister of Notre Dame be unfaithful to the graces offered to her by your love.

XXIV : ON SILENCE

1. The necessity of silence

All the saints realised that a religious who has no love for silence will never become holy. This is because failure in silence is failure in what is absolutely necessary for attaining union with God, and without this union, sanctity is impossible. Without silence, recollection and the interior spirit are both impossible, the heart cannot be docile and attentive when God speaks to the soul and asks something of it by the inspirations of his grace, through the gentle and persuasive voice of the Holy Spirit.

It is evident, therefore, that a Sister of Notre Dame who is unfaithful to the rule of silence will never free herself from the life of the senses unless she takes a serious resolution of putting aside, once and forever, all useless thoughts and words. A Sister of Notre Dame who understands her vocation has no time to spend on idle words, nor in thinking about trifles. Her thoughts are all concerned with the interests of God's glory and those of his Church. She is busy about the salvation of souls, and so it comes about that unconsciously and almost without effort, she remains united to God because she tries to be faithful to the rule of silence. A religious who loves silence spreads around her the good odour of Christ in her community, while a sister who frequently fails in this virtue is a constant subject of bad example, especially to postulants and the sisters recently received amongst us.

The cause of the relaxation that has crept into certain communities is nearly always traceable to the tepidity of some sisters who began by failures against the rule of silence. Silence is the guardian of the interior spirit, of innocence, of simplicity, of the love of God and of our neighbour. Has not the Holy Spirit said: "A wise man will hold his peace till he sees opportunity; but a babblers and a fool will regard not time". (Eccls.20:7).

The particular end in view through the observance of silence is to safeguard the spirit of recollection by cutting off all useless thoughts. Idle thoughts cause distractions, and hinder God from taking the place due to him in our heart, besides making it impossible for the soul to entertain herself intimately with the heavenly spouse. A religious who is forgetful of the rule of silence brings to meditation a distracted heart, and a preoccupied mind, and instead of deriving from prayer renewed strength to enable her to be more worthy of working more and more earnestly for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls, she only makes herself more guilty before God, by going to him with a heart taken up with mere trifles. A Sister of Notre Dame must never act like this. If she did she would be unworthy of our holy Institute.

2. On the government of the tongue

Although the tongue is among the smallest of our bodily members, it is one of the most important and is capable of producing either much good or much evil. It is the tongue which utters blessings or curses. A little reflection, a moment of self examination will show us that the greater number of our

faults come from our tongue. It is not without good reason that St. James says: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (James 3:2). Silence, well observed in a community, shows that the presence of God is remembered, and that all are earnestly striving towards perfection.

My dear sisters, love the rule of silence and keep it well. Then each of our houses will be a temple where the good God will dwell, and the heart of each sister a tabernacle in which he will abide. There will he make known his will, tell his secrets, receive continual adoration and converse familiarly with her. On the other hand, my dear sisters, should the rule of silence come to be easily broken among us, God will turn away from our Institute, the spirit of recollection will be destroyed, and general confusion will speedily end in complete ruin. Intimate converse with God is easily stifled when exterior conversation and talking is not repressed. This is the cause of immense evil.

XXV : ON CONTEMPT OF CREATURES

1.Necessity of detachment

Only those souls will be happy in the Institute of Notre Dame who know how to mortify self, how to be detached from creatures and free from the trammels of self love in order to belong to God alone. For although we are not in direct contact with the world outside, we have another little world which we carry within us, and which we must resist if we want to enjoy peace of soul, that peace which is the most precious fruit of life in religion. Without it nothing that we do can procure the glory of God or produce fruit in souls, nor can we gain any merit for ourselves because peace comes of the union of charity and purity. Happy are those who regard creatures as so many enemies which turn them away from God, or strive to keep him at a distance. St. Mary Magdalen, the great penitent, cried out to all creatures and memories of her past: "Begone; leave me in peace, for I have found him whom my soul loves. In solitude and silence I found him, in prayer and mortification, by forsaking all creatures, and in contempt of myself. In the house of the Pharisee I faced shame for his sake, and from that day I followed my Jesus even to Calvary, where I offered him my life". Like Mary Magdalen, if we want to possess our beloved, we must be generous. We must forsake all things, and especially our own self love in order to belong only to him.

2.Danger of worldliness

We must avoid all useless contact with the world. How little soever this pernicious atmosphere penetrates into our communities, it makes itself felt immediately. It is always hurtful; for it destroys recollection and hinders union with God. Little by little a worldly spirit kills the spiritual life of those who are not watchful against it, and who recognise too late the destruction wrought within them. When we truly love God we hold in contempt all that does not lead to him.

3.Danger of seeking consolation in creatures

A great saint said: "A heart is indeed avaricious when God does not satisfy it". My dear sisters, never seek consolation in creatures because they are always liable to change, and just when we need them most they may fail us. God has made creatures changeable because he wants us to trust in him alone. God alone must be our strength because he alone is all powerful, he alone changes not.

It is surprising to see even virtuous people seeking consolation elsewhere than in God. This happens because their interior spirit is weak and hence they cannot know God sufficiently well, since he only manifests himself to those who trust him entirely. A really interior soul easily grasps the nothingness

of earthly things; that God alone suffices in whom those who seek find all

XXVI : SELF SURRENDER

1. Self surrender promotes sanctity

It is by filial abandonment of ourselves to the guidance of God that we become saints. A soul that gives herself sincerely to the good God finds no hindrance in the various accidents that befall her through life. Rather does she see in them opportunities sent by her heavenly Father to help her to become more holy, to advance more rapidly in perfection, and to produce more fruit in the steep path all must climb before they reach heaven; the many hard trials of life are all mitigated for a soul wholly given up to the good pleasure of God. Abandonment gives strength, peace, even joy, amidst the greatest difficulties. Abandonment recognises and adores the Fatherhood of God, and the good God loves a soul who sees in him a well beloved father. Ah, how sweet a peace does an interior soul find in utter abandonment to God. What solid consolation does she not find at the feet of Christ crucified when, overwhelmed with trouble, she throws herself with complete trust into the arms of this loving father, who tries her only because he loves her. A Sister of Notre Dame must live in filial self surrender. The good God never fails those who trust themselves utterly to him. No matter what happens a Sister of Notre Dame must always say: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit and my heart"; or better still: "I place both in your divine heart, keep them safe there, most loving Father". True self surrender allows of no anxious forecasting of events, no fear, no desire. It lives from moment to moment. To practice true self surrender is to belong wholly to God, to let him act as he pleases, without being restless under the guidance of his fatherly hand.

2. God requires complete self surrender from a Sister of Notre Dame

My dear good daughters, we must live in complete abandonment to God. Penetrate yourselves thoroughly with the thought that God is a father who loves you, and conform yourselves in everything to his most holy will. To be a true Sister of Notre Dame you must give yourselves perfectly to God, leave utterly in his hands life and death, consolation and desolation, honour or contempt. You must practise this self surrender in your charges, in all the employments assigned to you by holy obedience; here today, elsewhere tomorrow. "The earth is the Lord's" (Ps.23:1) and every place in it ought to be the same to Sisters of Notre Dame, who have the happiness of walking in the footsteps of the apostles, according to the spirit of our holy Institute. Like the apostles, too, we must go wherever there are souls to be saved, overcoming all obstacles, braving all difficulties, without being afraid of anything. To become worthy of so holy and apostolic a vocation we must leave ourselves in the hands of God without any reserve, so that he may try us, and purify us by suffering, and by all that crucifies nature and puts self love and one's own judgement to death.

3. Self surrender - a source of happiness

A Sister of Notre Dame who abandons herself completely to the good pleasure of God is very happy, in as much as she finds in this perfect surrender of herself into the hands of her good God a remedy for any adverse circumstance which may occur. As she takes everything straight from the hand of God, nothing seems difficult to her, however nature may shrink from its performance, because such a soul is convinced of the fact that God loves her, that he will not try her beyond her strength, and that the same divine hand that strikes and afflicts her will also sustain, relieve and comfort her.

A disposition of perfect abandonment like this is always accompanied by distrust of self, and an immense confidence in God. We must be, first and foremost, souls who practise abandonment to God; it is the surest way of pleasing him and of procuring his glory. God loves and caresses a soul

who gives herself up calmly and joyously to his love, trusting him as a most dear father.

4. Self surrender gives serenity of soul

People are sometimes astonished to see those who are suffering or who are greatly tried in so great serenity of spirit that nothing seems to upset them.

Whence comes this calm, tranquil peace in the midst of personal anxieties, or amid those troubles and afflictions that are inevitable in this world? Its source is in holy surrender of self to God. Desiring nothing on earth but the accomplishment of God's good pleasure, such souls sail peaceful and smiling over the deepest ocean, despite all storms and tempests. This is what all those must aim at who wish to serve God in our holy Institute. Great happiness, and purest joy is the reward of the Sister of Notre Dame who desires nothing else upon earth but the accomplishment of the good pleasure of God, made known to her by the voice of her superiors.

XXVII : ON THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY

1. The necessity of being humble

A Sister of Notre Dame who desires to promote the glory of God and to devote herself to his interests must humble and abase herself in the least little things, putting no trust in herself. When occasions of practising great virtue occur, she should distrust herself still more, and through religious humility, confide wholly in God. She will be thereby fortified and urged on to greater good, for "he who knows that God is his support cannot be feeble". This was the advice St. Francis Xavier used to give his brother Jesuits when he left them to go on a mission.

A Sister of Notre Dame who wishes to do good to souls must entertain in herself sentiments of humility and complete self abasement if she wants God to bless her work. If we are well persuaded that we deserve nothing but contempt, we shall never be troubled when it pleases our Lord to make us drink the chalice of humiliation, for we shall believe we deserve still more, and shall rejoice in the glory rendered to God by a soul who receives contempt meekly and willingly.

2. Humility safeguards other virtues

Humility is the guardian of all the other virtues. One who is sincerely humble is never discouraged by any difficulty. The knowledge of our lowliness and nothingness ought to be our greatest strength. A Sister of Notre Dame ought to say like St. Paul: "When I am weak, then am I strong, for the grace of God acts in me" (Cf. 2 Cor.12:10). Since God has called us, my dear daughters, us poor weak women, sinners as we are, we have a right to expect all from his bounty. But to count upon ourselves would be overweening pride, which could only result in the overthrow of our Institute, for the good God will cease blessing us the moment we cease to keep ourselves profoundly humble; instead of being helped by God we should fall under the power of the devil.

My good sisters, let us be on our guard against what St. Ignatius called humility with a hook, that is to say against that humility which confesses itself in fault, which contemns self in words, but which will never allow itself to be humiliated or despised by anyone else without taking offence, and making a great disturbance. A truly humble soul never speaks of self, whether for good or ill, but it allows itself to be humbled, and rejoices when others esteem and appreciate it at its true value, that is to say, as it thinks itself to be - altogether nothing: good for nothing, and deserving nothing. A sister,

lost like this in contempt of self, is always full of the greater glory of her God. When she succeeds, she is not astonished, nor does she take the credit to herself, she recognises at once the action of God in his lowly instrument, knowing that she is incapable of doing anything good of herself.

3. Humility attracts God's grace

The good God, my dear sisters, looks lovingly upon souls that are truly humble, and favours them with his greatest grace and most precious gifts. The more lowly we are, the more will the good God stoop down to us.

Humility is evidenced by great patience in all the contradictions that befall us. Whatever it is that troubles our self love, let us say to ourselves that we well deserve it, that no one does wrong in blaming us, that we are only worthy of contempt and crosses. That is the true way to acquire holy humility without which we shall never be true Sisters of Notre Dame, or persevere in our vocation. Let us always maintain lowly thoughts of self; of the poverty of our spiritual state; of the weakness which makes us fall at the slightest temptation. All these will be so many steps by which we can help ourselves to obtain the inestimable virtue of humility.

4. Humility helps union with God

Humility is a virtue which Sisters of Notre Dame must force themselves to acquire. When anyone first leaves the world, dear sisters, humility is utterly unknown. But it is the mother and source of all other virtues, and the good God gives his blessing only to the humble. Holy Scripture says: "The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds" (Cf. Ps. 35:6). Instead of distressing ourselves when we see that our children gain nothing from our lessons, or when we think we are doing no good to souls, we ought to humble ourselves before God and examine ourselves carefully to see if there is not something in our thoughts, words or actions opposed to true humility. Nearly always we shall find that we have relied upon ourselves, that we have acted without first having recourse to God. For he sometimes lets us do but a barren work until we come to recognise our nothingness, our inability to do anything of worth in God's sight, if that good God does not himself do all in us and for us.

We are Sisters of our Lady, consequently we ought, after the example of the blessed Virgin, to draw the good God into our hearts by the practice of perfect humility.

5. Humility - indispensable for perfection

If humility is necessary to every Christian for salvation, it is indispensable for the perfection demanded of a Sister of Notre Dame. A humble soul is invincible, because she has at her disposal the power of God who clothes with his own strength a soul who is humble, who abases herself, and who, lost in the abyss of her own littleness, throws herself into the great all - God. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the lowly and to little ones, my dear good daughters, even as the conquest of the world is theirs.

Be little in your own eyes, walk bravely in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Lord, who was lowly and unknown, yet saved the world by allowing it to trample him underfoot. He left us the example of this beautiful virtue of humility; he earnestly pleaded with us to practise it, by that sweet and loving invitation: "Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. 11:29). We make profession of imitating our Lord, we must, therefore, make open profession of humility. Without it you will produce no fruit in souls. It needs energy to practise humility because nature must be constantly overcome in order that grace may triumph.

Let us beware of relying on ourselves in the great work of saving souls. Work, rather, at putting to death all natural activity so that God may act for us in this work which touches his glory to nearly.

6.Humility seeks to be unknown

"Love to be unknown and to be accounted as nothing", says the Imitation (Cf. Bk.3, Ch.5). Very few really love and seek to be unknown, and nevertheless, God knows us and we know God only in so far as we seek to be unknown to the world. If we are truly humble, we shall triumph over sinners and those who are ignorant. By becoming lowly, Jesus Christ the light of the world, triumphs over all hearts, reigns over all the souls of men. Without humility, holiness cannot exist; without humility, nothing is accomplished for the glory of God; without humility, no souls can be saved. Ground yourselves firmly in humility; be little, hold yourselves as nothing, so that the good God may not be hindered in the work he wishes to do in you and through you.

XXVIII : ON PEACE OF SOUL

1.Means of obtaining peace of soul

We must endeavour to keep ourselves calm and in peace. Peace consists in humble, entire and constant submission to the adorable will of God: submission in times of unusual trial, submission under violent temptation, submission when all within us is in a state of revolt, trouble, and distress. At such times we must keep our peace of soul by putting ourselves and all that concerns us into the hands of God, into the adorable heart of our divine Lord where we shall find true rest, rest that is only possible to a soul who, distrusting self, lives in God by perfect submission and trust. To cut oneself off from every pleasure, to receive from the hand of God whatever is painful, to conquer natural repugnance in everything from a desire to please and give glory to God: these are the means of keeping our soul in peace.

2.Self denial is necessary to peace

Those who have nothing in view but the interests of God alone without seeking their own will in anything at all begin to enjoy, even in this life, a heavenly peace which is a foretaste of eternal happiness. Such souls are always calm and tranquil because they act solely to please God without any preoccupation concerning themselves or creatures. A soul in these dispositions finds happiness and joy because she knows how to glorify God in whatever circumstances she may be placed, whereas one who seeks only self is always restless and anxious. We think to make ourselves happy by satisfying our desires, but we never find true happiness by that means, since happiness consists first of all in peace, and peace is the fruit of renunciation of self and abandonment to God. Those who seek self never enjoy peace of conscience, for remorse, that gnawing worm, leaves little tranquility to such a soul. The thought that she is not living according to her holy profession constantly reproaches her, and this is much more painful than continual self denial practised for the love of God. Nature, it is true, suffers from this utter crucifixion of self, but this suffering is not to be compared to what a religious endures who, to satisfy self love, acts contrary to the will of God in little things. By doing this, even though no grave faults are committed, she lives in an anticipated hell; but a good Sister of Notre Dame lives in an anticipated heaven, for she enjoys the fulness of peace through a life of self sacrifice.

3.Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit

We cannot advance in perfection or produce fruit in the souls confided to our care without the special assistance of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit cannot make himself heard in a troubled soul, for our Lord Jesus Christ said to his apostles: "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (Luke 11:19). Our divine Saviour gave them this instruction to make them understand that they would have to suffer persecution, and would have to keep themselves in great peace and tranquillity in order to become strong in suffering, and able to continue fruitfully the work of God. My dear sisters, we too are apostles, we also shall have to suffer, but the Holy Spirit will be our strength if we keep ourselves in peace, that is to say, trustful and totally abandoned to God's good pleasure.

XXIX : THE VALUE AND GOOD EMPLOYMENT OF TIME

Our good mother laid great stress yesterday on the value of time. Time is infinitely more precious than all the treasures of the world, for with it we make provision for eternity. We do not pay enough attention, she said, to the fact that to each moment of time corresponds an eternity of happiness or loss, since each moment either increases or lessens for us our eternal glory or our eternal pain. If we pondered this seriously, we should be more careful to profit of every instant God gives us. Since time is but the money, as it were, given to us here below with which to purchase imperishable good, let us be careful how we use it.

To this end we should ask of the Holy Spirit his gifts of counsel and knowledge, and endeavour always to walk in the presence of God. We must try to make our children well understand the value of time. It is always a good sign when young people appreciate the worth of time, because then they will make good use of it in their own interests and in those of their neighbour. Nowadays there are many living in the world who waste their time during the whole of their lives, and so risk their salvation for all eternity.

The good use of time makes a woman hard working, and work, especially in the young, nourishes piety and is a safeguard to purity of both body and soul.

It is, then, for us Sisters of Notre Dame, a very important duty to teach our children how to multiply their lives a hundredfold by being devoted, and by that very means to secure for them a happy eternity.

We can apply to the good use of time what St. Augustine said of prayer: "He who works well, prays well and lives a virtuous life; those who waste time, pray badly, live evil lives ... and very often lose their souls".

The good employment of time is a matter of supreme importance in the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Since we are called to a sublime vocation, approximating to the ministry of the priesthood, that is to say, to a thoroughly apostolic vocation, we ought to fulfil its functions with consummate perfection. Let us often call to mind, my good sisters, as indeed our venerated Mère Julie often reminds us, that the good God, having placed us upon a candlestick to enlighten the children confided to us, and to give them good example, we shall be answerable before God, and traitors to our vocation if we let precious time escape us, which we ought to devote to training ourselves in the branches of human knowledge. These are useful and necessary for the work of education, a work very pleasing to God and which procures the salvation of so many souls. How bitterly will a Sister of Notre Dame reproach herself at the hour of death if, through her own fault, she has rendered herself incapable to fulfilling the functions of the sublime state to which the good God has vouchsafed to call her. How many children, whom she ought to have instructed and brought

into the way of salvation, will then reproach her for having, in part at least, caused the eternal loss of their souls because she neglected the means of becoming an instrument God could use to procure their salvation.

Our good mother used especially to recommend us to spend the hour of our morning meditation in thinking over the use to be made of our time, the value of souls, and the grandeur of a vocation in which every moment of life has purchasing power for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

There is nothing personal about our vocation. We cannot waste even a minute of our time without wasting that same minute for perhaps hundreds of other souls. We no longer belong to ourselves - our time, our whole being, everything belongs to the good God and to souls. Hence to waste our time would be a crying injustice, an act of black ingratitude.

We have but little time, sisters, and a long way to go, but we can shorten the way and multiply our time by being fervent and courageous, and above all by keeping closely united to God. Union with God produces rich fruits of apostolic zeal, and those young saints who fulfilled long life in a short space (Wis.4:13) were distinguished for their intimate union with him.

Nothing advances us more quickly in the supreme affair of salvation than intimate converse with God, and interior immolation of self in union with Jesus crucified, while exteriorly we are devoting ourselves to the different charges assigned us by obedience. If we are not faithful in following the wise counsels of our mother in this matter, we run the risk of never reaching the goal we set out for, or of arriving there too late and with no light in our lamps. How hard it will be then, to hear from our Lord's divine lips the words: "I know you not" (Matt.25:12). Our good mother often excites our fervour by reminding us of all this, while she encourages us to bear the sufferings and difficulties inevitable to our vocation.

You have passions to restrain, duties to fulfil, nature to control and mortify. If you want to triumph all along the lines, be fervent. Fervour gives a right to confidence, and confidence is a lever which lifts us above ourselves to cast us into the heart of Jesus, where our souls will be filled with the spirit of Jesus, and our hearts with his love. Ah, my good daughters, when a soul really loves the good God, it lives a year in a single hour, so much does it do for the glory of God, so great is its influence over souls.

When anyone truly loves the good God, she gives away all that belongs to her, and applies the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ to souls. Yes! a soul in love with the good God treats of great things with him and becomes a powerful apostle. (9)

XXX : NEED OF STUDYING CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, ETC.

My dear sisters, we must apply ourselves very specially to the perfect mastery of Christian Doctrine, so as to understand it thoroughly in order to be able to teach others. During our prayer we should ponder the truths of religion, for this is the best of all sciences, indeed the only one absolutely necessary, since without it we cannot help to save souls, and this is the one aim of our vocation.

If we are not profoundly penetrated with the truths contained in the catechism, we cannot instil them into the souls of our children. They may learn the catechism by heart, but they will not acquire any deep knowledge of Christian Doctrine, nor learn the life of Jesus Christ and the wonderful example he has left us. We must not give religious instruction to our children without having meditated in the presence of God upon what we intend to teach them. This is necessary in order that the Holy Spirit

may speak through us, for of all good works, the greatest and most important is the instruction of children in the truths of our holy religion. This is the best means of making them good Catholics, deeply attached to God and to his holy Church. Thus shall we foster their good dispositions so that they may save their own souls and help to save many others. We must also do all in our power to acquire those branches of secular knowledge which will be useful in teaching the children and young girls whom God confides to our care.

My dear sisters, although I spoke on this subject at great length during the retreat, I must come back upon it today, lest any abuse might creep in among the younger sisters. Never while I am alive will I allow any sister to spend her time in frivolous needlework. Our holy state of life is much too sublime for us to be taken up with such trifles; we must do solid work in our Institute. Once again I tell you, if God had not enlightened me upon this subject during my meditation, I should end by having daughters who are only embroidresses. That must never be. It would be quite contrary to the spirit of our Institute. I shall never allow anything opposed to the end of our holy Institute, which is to train the young to be Catholics, serious mothers of families, well acquainted with all household works, like the "valiant woman" of holy scripture (Prov.21).

This very morning I asked God during my meditation and after holy communion to deign to enlighten me as to what I ought to do. My dear sisters, we must give our children a solid education which will stand them in good stead later on in life. First of all we must instruct them thoroughly in Christian Doctrine and in everything that concerns our holy religion. After this let them acquire whatever knowledge is necessary for their position in life, so that they may be a help to their parents. Teach them writing, composition, grammar, arithmetic, good plain sewing, and the making and mending of garments, etc. What use will it be to any of them to be able to embroider a bit of muslin if they have no idea how to set about making necessary things or doing household duties? They would be taken in by others again and again, and would always be thriftless.

Nevertheless I make one exception. When parents bring their children and ask that they may be taught embroidery because they are able to employ others to do plain sewing for them, then for the sake of gaining souls and of not neglecting the work of education, I might allow fancy work to be taught. Or again, if a young girl stays with us for several years, and at the end of her course she asks to learn embroidery, I would give permission. But except in these cases, never.

I know quite well that if we taught things of this sort to our children, we should have many more sent to us, but God grant that I may never yield to a motive of self interest. The good God has not forsaken us yet, nor will he ever forsake us. Those who have a talent for work of this kind may make use of it by embroidering vestments and church ornaments.

XXXI : MOTIVES OF CONFIDENCE FOR A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME AT THE HOUR OF DEATH

1. Fidelity to the Holy Rule

A faithful Sister of Notre Dame will have immense consolation at the hour of death. She will be able to say to our Lord in peace and calm of soul: "My God, I have done all I could to fulfil the task assigned to me, according to your desires. I have neglected nothing that tended to increase within my soul the spirit of our holy Institute. I have used all the means put at my disposal for advancing in different sorts of knowledge so as to render myself fit for whatever employment my superiors thought good to give me. I made constant efforts to uproot my evil inclinations. Helped by your

grace, O my God, and by the wise counsels of my superiors, I have neglected nothing which might aid me to become a good religious, in spite of the repugnance of my lower nature. I have done my utmost to observe the Holy Rule. This is now my chief consolation. Lastly, I die happy and come confidently to you, O my God, hoping you will forgive all my human weaknesses, and deign to have mercy upon me. My only wish has been to promote your greater glory and the salvation of souls".

2. Remembrance of having done God's will

In order to taste the sweetness of consolation on her death bed and to establish in her soul a firm trust in God, a Sister of Notre Dame must remind herself every day that she entered the Institute in order to increase the reign of God in her heart, and to form Jesus Christ in the souls confided to her care.

If her whole conduct is guided by this principle, she will be calm and radiant at the hour of death, and will be able to say: "Lord, I have accomplished your work, I have lived according to obedience. I accepted every duty which went against the grain, looking only in all things, to the fulfilling of your holy and adorable will. Dispose of me as you will, O my God, but have mercy upon me".

3. Remembrance of work done for God

A good Sister of Notre Dame ought to experience great consolation at the hour of death. She can say: "Lord, I have accomplished the work you gave me to do. I have always seen and respected your authority in that of my superiors, seeing you in them. I have always obeyed them, as if you yourself gave me the command. I have made continual war upon my senses, only granting them what I was powerless to refuse. I have always been content with what was given to me, not desiring anything better. I have neglected nothing that could help to make you known and loved by the little souls whom you confided to my care. I have been faithful to my holy vows, to the Holy Rule, to my mental prayer, in spite of the dryness I often experienced. These are the things which reassure me, when I think of your rigorous justice, O my God. I die full of confidence that you will pardon me the sins and weaknesses from which you have so often cleansed me by holy absolution. With humble trust, I even dare to ask you all that you promised to those who left all to follow you, were it but a fishing boat and a few poor nets".
