22. - RECONCILIATION

[Between 1634 and 1646]¹

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

The reconciliation you've promised to make when you've had the misfortune of being angry with one another is a great means of improving. It's something that's very necessary, and Our Lord himself ordered it, saying, 'The sun must not go down on your wrath,'² and, 'If your gift is on the altar and you recall having had an argument with your neighbor, go first to be reconciled with your neighbor before offering it.'³ So you see, Sisters, if you're on bad terms with your neighbor, God can't be pleased with anything you do. So, as soon as you see that you've displeased one of your Sisters, throw yourself at her feet and ask her pardon, saying, 'Please forgive me, dear Sister; I let myself get carried away by my feelings and am so unfortunate as to have annoyed you.' That's what I do, dear Sisters.

Conference 22. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise's handwriting. The beginning of the text is missing.

¹The years between which Saint Louise recorded the conferences.
²Cf. Eph 4:26. (NAB)
³Cf. Mt 5:23-24. (NAB)
If I thought I had displeased anyone, I couldn’t go on without being reconciled.”

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

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

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

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

“My very dear Sisters, when you want to remind a companion of some fault, I beg you, for the love of God, to commend to God what you have to say and, if the matter warrants it, make your prayer on it. God will bless the advice you give in this way, and your Sister will benefit by it.

“Another matter of great importance, dear Sisters, is the way newcomers should act toward the senior Sisters, and vice versa. Those who have recently arrived should honor the childhood of Our Lord by being respectful toward the older Sisters, have a high regard for them, since they were called by God before them to His service and that of their neighbor, and be very deferential toward them, humbly accepting their advice. Although the Son of God was more learned in everything than Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, and all honor was due to Him, He was still subject to them and didn’t fail to do the lowliest tasks in the home, and it’s said of Him that He grew in wisdom and age. May this example be a powerful motive, Sisters, to make you gentle, humble, and submissive, and not to murmur when a Sister reminds you of some fault!”
The first point concerns the reasons we have to dispose ourselves to make good Communions; the second, the means of preparing well for them; and the third, the signs by which we may know if we’re making them well. The Sisters who were present included not only those living in the city, but also seven or eight from the villages, whom Divine Providence apparently inspired to come, without being notified, to hear the charitable counsels of our dear, good Father on this important topic.

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

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

“And you, Sister, please tell us the reasons we should have to prepare well for Holy Communion.”

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

“And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts on the subject of this conference.”

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

“And what means should be used to make a good Communion, Sister?”

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

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

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

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

"God be praised, Sisters, for the thoughts He has given you! Sister has said that, when we experience peace and satisfaction in our conscience, it’s a sign that we’ve made a good Communion. I can say that this is true, Sisters, but it isn’t the only sign, for there are others. I can also tell you that it isn’t always an infallible sign, for there are souls so hardened to sin that nothing moves them, and there are others so obtuse as to have no sentiments of fear or love. To grasp this truth, think about Saint Catherine, ¹ who had such love for Our Lord and worked so assiduously at her perfection. At the time of Holy Communion, she was tortured by such abominable thoughts that she feared being abandoned by God. In the moments when Our Lord communicated himself tenderly to her, she spoke to Him heart to heart. One day, when she was complaining to Him of those horrible images, He assured her that, when they were at their

¹Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-80), a Dominican Tertiary and mystic.
worst, He was in the center of her heart. That’s how it is with certain souls whom God is pleased to try in this way, Sisters. I knew a very virtuous person so violently attacked by those horrible troubles at the time of Holy Communion that I really felt sorry for her. Outside the time of Holy Communion she never had any thought like that; those thoughts were so terrible that I wouldn’t dare mention them to you. Since God is pleased to try His own, Sisters, don’t think, every time you feel so troubled, that your Communion hasn’t been well made. Still, you must use every means to remain peaceful and to have your mind at rest at the time of Holy Communion.

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

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

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

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

“Several motives occurred to me on this subject and I dwelt especially on two of them. One is what you’ve already said, namely, that if we make a bad Communion, we receive our own condemnation. How we should dread this danger, Sisters! When I was passing through the courtyard of Saint-Lazare on my way here, I heard that the Court of Justice had convened regarding the condemnation of a man.³ That touched me deeply; yet, what is temporal condemnation

³Saint-Lazare had seigneurial rights in its domain, i.e., the right of high, medium, and low justice, depending on the gravity of the case. It was allowed to treat of matters which involved capital punishment, incarceration or a lesser penalty, and matters of minor importance. There was a prison at Saint-Lazare and one in the Villencuve-sur-Gravois sector of Paris, having the means to inflict corporal punishment.
compared with spiritual? The state of that poor sufferer seemed deplorable to me because he was waiting for the sentence of condemnation. In the same way, receiving Communion unworthily is a condemnation that is carried out before God.

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

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

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

"One of the benefits we receive from a good Communion, Sisters, is that we become one with God. Quoi! a poor Daughter of Charity who, before her Communion was what she is, that is, something worth very little in itself, becomes one with God! Ah, Sisters, who would want to neglect this benefit? What a grace! What do you think it is, Sisters, if not the pledge of a blessed eternity? Could we imagine anything greater, dear Sisters? Oh no! it’s not possible that a poor, weak creature might be united to a God! May He be forever blessed!
"I'm moving from this point, on which I'm not going to dwell any longer, to tell you, Sisters, that one of the signs of a good Communion is peace and tranquility of heart. In the person who has made a worthy Communion, this peace proceeds from knowing that she has done what she could, and her conscience doesn't reproach her in any way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24. - LOVE OF VOCATION AND ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR

February 13, 1646

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

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

The Sister replied that, on the last day on which it was permitted to eat meat, she was taking a pot of soup to one of her poor persons. As she was going up the stairs, a poor water carrier in front of her cried out, “We’re lost!” She was between the first and second floor, and no sooner had the poor man uttered these words than the house began to fall. Our poor Sister, terrified, crouched in the corner of one of the steps. The frightened neighbors ran at once for the Blessed Sacrament and Extreme Unction to be administered to those capable of receiving them. However, more than thirty-five or

Conference 24. - MS. SV 9, fol. 81v ff.
1February 10, the last Saturday of the season during which Church law permitted eating meat.
forty persons were piteously crushed beneath the ruins of the house, and only a child of ten or eleven years of age could be saved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“On my arrival, I visited the sick persons and went to get the Blessed Sacrament for those in greatest danger—not at the parish church for the district wasn’t a parish but depended on a Chapter of which I was the Prior. So, after I had heard their confessions and

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2Châtillon-les-Dombes.
given them Holy Communion, the next thing was to see how to provide for their needs. I suggested that all those good persons animated by charity to go there might each take a day to make soup, not for those sick persons only, but also for others who might come afterward, and that’s the first place where the Confraternity of Charity was established.  

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

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

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

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

"And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it
wasn't then what it is now, there's reason to believe that it's still not
what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it; for, Sisters,
don't think that Communities are formed all at once. Saint Bene-
dict, Saint Augustine, Saint Dominic, and all those great servants of
God whose Orders are so flourishing, never dreamed of doing what
they actually accomplished; but God acted through them.

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

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

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

"Another reason is God's very special protection over you. Isn't it wonderful, Sisters? You have a recent example of that in the case of your dear Sister. Doesn't that help us to see that God is pleased in a very special way with the service you render Him in the person of the poor? Is anything more obvious? A brand new house collapses; forty people are crushed beneath its ruins; this poor Sister with her soup pot is huddled on a step that Providence expressly preserved to support her, and she emerges from the danger safe and sound. The

\[5\text{Cf. Dt 7:6. (NAB)}\]
angels bore her up; believe it, Sisters, for what indication is there that human beings did it? They certainly lent a hand to it, but the angels bore her up. Do you think, Sisters, that God allowed this new house to collapse, without some special purpose in mind? Do you think it caved in simply by chance when our Sister was present, and do you think that it was just good luck that she escaped without injury? Certainly not, Sisters; all that is miraculous. God had ordained it all to let your Company see the care He takes of it.

"It isn't to our Sister alone that such a remarkable grace is granted, it's to all of you; it's to confirm you in the belief you should have that He's pleased with your service; it's to let you see that you're as dear to Him as the apple of His eye; it's to oblige you, Sisters, to have unshakable trust in His Providence, which will never abandon you. Oh no, Sisters! you can be certain of that; this incident is an unquestionable indication of it. You'll be safe wherever you go; you'll often see the wrath of God punish a multitude of sinners with sudden and violent death, without the chance to turn back to Him; you'll even see many innocent persons perish, and you will be preserved. Yes, God is watching over you and sees to your protection.

"Do you think that the ceiling that collapsed about a year ago is another weak proof of this truth? It's one of the strongest. It's a miracle that a beam should crack in a place like that and that no one was either above or below. Mlle Le Gras was there; a Sister heard a cracking noise and told her that they weren't safe there, but she made light of it. An older Sister repeated the same thing to her, and in deference to her age and experience, she left the room. Scarcely was she in the next room (just think, Sisters, it wasn't three steps away) than the beam broke and the ceiling fell in. Can you tell me that this happened without God's special plan? I was due to be here

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6 In Spiritual Writings, L. 102, around June 1642, Saint Louise tells Sister Claude Brigide about the roof collapsing in their house. It made such a strong impression on Louise that on June 3, 1645, the Feast of Pentecost, anniversary of the event, she mentions it in a letter to Saint Vincent (ibid., L. 120). He refers to the event in a letter to her on June 8, 1642 (cf. II, 289), in a conference on June 20 (cf. IX, Conf. 11), and again in this conference of February 13, 1646. Could he be recalling the information given him by Saint Louise on the anniversary, or, as Coste speculates, might the copyist have misread the original?
that very afternoon; we were supposed to have a meeting regarding some important matters. The cracking of that beam wouldn't have been noticed amid the noise that goes on at meetings. That good Sister wouldn't have been there because the Sisters don't attend those meetings, and we would all have been crushed beneath had God not caused a certain business matter to detain me and kept all the Ladies from being here.

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

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

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

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

“Another Sister may have an aversion for her companion. Everything the latter does will displease her; if someone speaks to her about her, she’ll try to lower the esteem in which she is held; if this Sister says something to her, she won’t take it the right way. If she doesn’t correct herself, she also goes to Holy Communion with an attachment to sin, and she mustn’t do that. It’s so easy to correct this! I have an aversion for a Sister, but I don’t want to nurture it; I’ll speak gently to her; if she tells me something, I’ll listen to her willingly; when people speak to me about her, I’ll be careful not to say anything that may lower or diminish the esteem in which she is held.
"If you act in this way, Sisters, you'll advance because you'll benefit from your Communions and conferences. Mon Dieu! how I hope that you'll understand clearly the Spirit of God in the conferences and will get used to sharing your thoughts, as you've just done. I'm delighted to see this disposition in you because you can see what subject matter your thoughts furnish me. I'm not saying anything of my own; I'm simply repeating what you yourselves have said to me. Blessed be God! I desire this so ardently that I can truly say that I don't think I want anything else. For you see, Sisters, all attachments, aversions, and those obstacles that hinder the good results of Communions and instructions are the work of the devil, who is bursting at the sight of what you're doing and does his utmost to prevent you from benefiting from it. 'What am I doing here?' he'll suggest to the Sisters in this house, 'I came to serve the sick and I'm not being sent to them.' And to a Sister in a parish, 'I'd do much better if I were at the Foundlings.' And he does all this so that when she goes to Communion with either these attachments or aversions, she gains nothing from it. When you feel that way, Sisters, say so immediately.

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

"Another motive, also given by a Sister, is that God has promised an eternal reward to those who give a cup of water to a poor person; nothing is more true, we can't doubt it; and that's a great source of confidence for you, Sisters, for if God confers a blessed eternity
on those who have given them only a cup of water, what will He not give to a Daughter of Charity who has left everything and makes the gift of herself to serve them all the days of her life? What will He give to her? We can’t even imagine! She has reason to hope that she’ll be among those to whom He’ll say, ‘Come, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you.’

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

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

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

Thereupon a Sister objected that very often the priests didn’t pay any attention to this. “Sister,” replied M. Vincent, “be very careful never to think that they neglect this duty; but, once you’ve informed them, then your conscience is clear before God. One of you very aptly remarked that it was good to teach poor persons how to make an act of contrition and to instill in them the desire and resolution to

7Cf. Mt 25:34. (NAB)
go to confession. So do that, Sister, and if their condition deteriorates, you could inform the Pastor a second time—never by way of complaint, however, but gently. You might say to him, 'Monsieur, this poor patient is getting worse; I'm afraid he may not recover; I felt obliged to let you know.' And do it gently.

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

25. - INDIFFERENCE

May 1, 1646

"I wasn't expecting to have a meeting today, Sisters. I had intended to postpone it to another day and thought I had made that clear in the reply I sent, but you must not have received the message. I was prepared to speak only to three or four Sisters who, by the order of Providence, are to leave tomorrow for a foundation in Le Mans, but, since the same Providence has brought all of you together, let's say a few words, in nomine Domini.

"Our short conference, then, will be on the indifference Daughters of Charity must have regarding their places of residence and their ministries, the qualities required for the Sisters who are sent to them, and the means of carrying out their obligations well.

"We'll begin with the first point, which is indifference, and so necessary to your Company that when it is no longer found in it, that will be a sure sign of its downfall. That's why those who want to be
true Daughters of Charity must be totally indifferent to whatever God wills to ordain in their regard: to be sent to this region or to another, to minister in this duty or in that, to be given orders by this person or by someone else; in a word, to be indifferent to everything.

"Don’t you see, dear Sisters, how every Sunday the people make public profession of the obedience they are willing to render to their Pastor by walking behind him in the procession? Do you ever see a single one of them turn back once they’ve begun to follow him? When they leave the church they have no idea where they’re going, nor by what route their Pastor will lead them. Most often, they go without knowing where, and it’s done that way to indicate their disposition to go wherever he chooses to lead them, be it to banishment or even to death. That’s why those Sunday processions were initiated.

"Furthermore, we’ve never seen a soldier, from the day he enlists under a captain, disobey him. Yes, a soldier never hesitates when a captain says to him, ‘Fall back here, advance there, retreat, halt.’ Moreover, I was talking recently to a gentleman, who has the honor to command a regiment, and I asked him, ‘But, Monsieur, are you always fully obeyed?’ ‘Oh,’ he replied, ‘there’s never any failure in that respect, Monsieur. It’s unheard of for a soldier not to advance, retreat, fall back, or give way when his captain tells him to do it. Very often we see clear danger; we’re going to perish; the enemy lies in ambush in the very place to which we’re being sent; we have to mount the breach, where we’ll be fired on immediately, yet we march forward as soon as the captain gives orders, although we’re almost sure to die.’

"Sisters, should greater obedience be found in those who go to meet death than in you who go to seek the glory of God? No, dear Sisters, I can’t believe that! And if God willed to punish the Company by allowing one of its members to love one ministry better than another, one parish better than another, the company of one Sister better than another, and if she were to refuse to go where we might want to send her, at that moment you would have to raise your hands and hearts to heaven and say, ‘What have we done to God that
He punishes us so rigorously as to have among us Sisters who resist His Will? At that moment, you should begin to pray and do penance in expiation of the crime one of you would have committed; at that moment you should sigh, beg for mercy, take the discipline, wear hair shirts and penitential girdles—if you have permission to do so—and omit nothing that could appease the wrath of God, whose anger would be made manifest by such neglect of duty. Those who have a real love of their vocation and ask for nothing but the fulfillment of God’s Will regarding the Company will experience those sentiments when they see disorders of this kind, which are devastating to total perfection.

“Wouldn’t it be distressing to see exclusive attachments or aversions among the Daughters of Charity: loving to be with one Sister and not with another; taking pleasure in talking with someone and not with your Superior; doing what has to be done in a certain place because you like it, but not in another because you get no pleasure from it! What a deplorable state that would be, dear Sisters! I hope, however, from the goodness of God, that none of you will fall into that and that there isn’t one of you who isn’t open to whatever God wants to do with her. Let’s go on, then, to the second part, and discuss the qualities of Sisters who are sent to make a foundation.

“When Solomon built the temple he was intending for the service of God, he had quantities of precious stones—diamonds, rubies, topazes, hyacinths, emeralds, opals—cast into the foundation, while the upper portion of the building was constructed only of ordinary stones, of which a thousand weren’t as valuable as a single one of those laid in the foundation. What do you think God might have wanted to teach you by that, dear Sisters? It meant that the Daughters of Charity who are now being chosen, and who will be chosen in the future, to go to foundations, must be precious stones—diamonds in firmness in their vocation and in the practice of their Rules, rubies in their love of God and in charity toward their neighbor, emeralds, garnets, topazes, and opals—embellished with beautiful virtues, which appear as lovely colors whichever way they are turned and regarded. In a word, they should be such that it
may be said of them, as was said of the foundation stones of Solomon's temple, 'One of them is worth a thousand.'

"And do you know, Sisters, why those who go to make a foundation (for a house that's being opened and to which no one has yet been sent is called a foundation. You're going to serve the sick in a hospital, in a place where no member of your Company has ever been; that's called going to make a foundation), do you know, I repeat, another very pressing reason? It's that those who go to make a foundation are models for all who will come after them. That's why they must have all the virtues that will ever be in all the others combined. All the good works that should ever be done in the place where they're going to be established must first of all be practiced by them. I wish you could have seen what Saint Teresa said..."  

**26. - Recommendations for the Visitation of the Paris Houses**

[July 1646]

"Sisters, making a visitation is no slight matter, and very few persons are capable of carrying one out in such a way as to make it helpful. It's one of the most difficult things to do well. Out of a hundred persons sometimes scarcely a dozen will be capable of it. One must be so prudent, so gracious, so gentle, so faithful to confidentiality—as secret as in the confessional!

"Let's just say a few words on this. In the first place, Sisters, it must be made in view of God alone and as the Blessed Virgin made it when she went to visit Saint Elizabeth, that is, with the greatest gentleness, charity, and love. She didn't reprimand anyone, but by..."

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1Shortly before her departure for Nantes (July 26, 1646), Saint Louise wrote some recommendations for the Officers of the Company in her absence (cf. Spiritual Writings. L. 144). In the letter she refers to a forthcoming conference by Saint Vincent on the subject of making visitations and the designation of some Sisters to make the visitations. It is in this context that the date has been assigned to this conference.
her example taught Saint Elizabeth and her whole family what they should be doing. Don’t ever rebuke anyone. Our Lord spent thirty years on this earth before reproving men, and He had come expressly to make a visitation. He never reprimanded a priest, a Phari­see, a Samaritan, or a Jew during all that time, yet He saw them behaving very badly. Oh no, never give a rebuke, never! If a Sister tells you her failings, listen to her and encourage her gently, ‘Oh well! that’s nothing, Sister. Our Lord will grant you the grace to become more exact. Alas! I commit many other faults.’ And if she complains of another Sister, never let on that she has spoken of her to you.

“The visitation must be made as if in passing. ‘I’m just coming to see how you are, Sister.’ Never say to this Sister or that, ‘I’m going to that place,’ and never mention any faults you may have noticed. Above all, beware of thinking that you must be a very important person because you’re being sent to others to make a visitation. Mon Dieu! that would be a hellish thought! ‘Quoi! from such a large number of Sisters, I’ve been chosen to make the visitation! They must surely have a good opinion of me.’ Don’t let such harmful thoughts cross your mind, but take a look at your own faults and reflect that if people were aware of them, they’d be very far from having a good opinion of you. ‘Quoi! miserable creature that I am! Must my hypocrisy deceive people?’ For, when you look at yourselves before God, Sisters, you’ll find that there’s no one worse than you. I’m bound to think the same of myself, and so should everyone else. If you see that this Sister doesn’t make her prayer, look at yourself and say, ‘Alas! what am I like?’ This Sister may be irritable. ‘Mon Dieu! the way I am, I can’t stand myself.’ And so on for everything else. Always consider yourself as the most imperfect.

“Now, it seems to me that Mlle Le Gras has named many Sisters to make visitations, but, because all might not be capable of this, I think it’s good to try two or three at first to see how that works out for us.² Sister Anne, you’ll go in passing to Saint-Jacques and

²Saint Vincent not only reduces the number of Sister Visitors for this initial attempt at visitations but also changes some of the ones designated by Saint Louise.
Saint-Gervais,³ and you, Sister,⁴ to Saint-Leu and to the galley convicts, and you’ll tell me what you will have remarked there. Above all, take your eyes and ears with you, but don’t take your tongue.”

27. - THE PRACTICE OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND GENTLENESS

August 19, 1646

The first point concerned the reasons why Daughters of Charity must strive to acquire these virtues of respect and gentleness.

On this point it was remarked that:

(1) It pleases God and our neighbor.
(2) It’s imitating Jesus Christ, who was full of gentleness.
(3) We couldn’t be true Daughters of Charity if we didn’t have those two virtues because there’s no gentleness without respect, and without gentleness we have no charity.
(4) It’s not enough to have charity toward strangers, but we must have it especially for our own Sisters. If we fail to show them respect and gentleness, it’s a sign that we have no love for them; therefore, we’re Daughters of Charity in appearance only and are unworthy to bear their name and habit.

³Saint Louise had designated Barbe Angiboust for Saint-Gervais and Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie; Saint Vincent substituted Anne Hardemont.

We get to know Sister Anne Hardemont from the many letters she preserved. In 1640 she was missioned to Saint-Paul parish; in 1647 she was chosen to establish the mission in Montreuil-sur-Mer, and in 1650 the one in Hennebont (Morbihan). In 1651 she was stationed in Nantes, and the following year in Châlons-sur-Marne. Because of illness she returned to Nantes, where she remained until 1653, at which time she went to Sainte-Menehould, then to Sedan in 1654, and La Roche-Guyon in 1655. She was present in Paris on August 8, 1655, and signed the Act of Establishment of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (cf. XIIIb,227). In 1656 she was at the Petites-Maisons in Paris and in Ussel in 1658. Because of her leadership ability, she was named Sister Servant in all these places, despite what Saint Vincent wrote to Saint Louise (cf. IV,258) that she was “somewhat to be feared.” This was undoubtedly the cause of her many changes. (Cf. IV, 180-81.)

⁴Saint Vincent is probably referring to Élisabeth Hellot, whom Saint Louise designated for Saint-Leu and the galley convicts.

Conference 27. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Élisabeth Hellot.
(5) If we had neither respect nor gentleness, that would give very bad example to our new Sisters and might dishearten all the young women who were thinking of joining our Company.

(6) Nothing can change the most embittered hearts more than gentleness. If we want to obtain something from a person, we ask for it respectfully and gently, and in that way are almost always sure to get it.

(7) If we're gentle with our Sisters, they'll be the same with us, with the whole Company and with poor persons, with whom we’re especially obliged to be gentle.

(8) Considering the grace God has granted us in bringing us all together in a state that seems to be most in conformity with the laborious life and works of Jesus Christ, we must strive to acquire these virtues because from all eternity He intended us to serve poor persons with gentleness and cordiality. He gave us outstanding examples of this in several circumstances of His life, both with the sick who were brought to Him to be healed, and with sinners and those who persecuted Him, like Judas who betrayed Him, and the high priest’s servant who struck Him.

(9) Among all the other virtues, respect and gentleness were recommended to us by Our Lord when He tells us, “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”

(10) He gave this lesson to His disciples before leaving them, “By this,” He told them, “they will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

(11) In the same way, people will know that we’re true Daughters of Charity if they see mutual respect and gentleness among us, since these virtues can be produced only by charity.

(12) Respect and gentleness foster peace. Where there is peace, God abides. Works done in a spirit of gentleness and peace are much more pleasing to God, and He may be glorified by the good example the neighbor receives from them.

As to the second point, we’ve said in what those virtues of respect and gentleness consist, and what faults are committed against them. On this it was pointed out:
(1) That respect and gentleness consist in deferring in all things to all our Sisters, and, when we meet them, manifesting great submission with a happy, cheerful expression, which shows the love we have for them.

(2) Respect consists in doing willingly whatever our Sisters may instruct us to do, offering no objection, especially since we can show no greater honor to a person than by doing what he wishes us to do, not through constraint but willingly, lovingly, and cordially. Gentleness consists in doing to our Sisters what we would like them to do to us, and in tolerating in them what we would want them to tolerate in us.

(3) These virtues also consist in being humble, obliging, and ready to help one another.

(4) In truly loving one another and always considering ourselves as the lowest, thinking that we owe much more respect to the Sister with whom we are living than she owes to us.

(5) In never allowing ourselves to do anything contrary to the honor we should show one another, looking on all our Sisters as daughters of the same Father, who loves every one of us tenderly and has chosen all of us to serve Him in the person of His poor, a ministry that demands gentleness of every kind, as He himself gives us the example in the Gospel proposed for our meditation today, when He so charitably cured the ten lepers presented to Him.

(6) In regarding our Sisters as the servants and spouses of Jesus Christ; if we’re respectful and gentle with the Spouse, we’ll be the same with His spouses.

(7) In being very open, aiding and assisting our Sisters in whatever way we think we can relieve them, respecting them, greeting them with a joyful expression that is neither sad nor sullen, and manifesting our contentment with the admonitions they give us. And if we have any to give them, never doing so in public, but in private.

(8) In never using sharp or contemptuous language but, on the contrary, being very sincere and respectful, never rebuking one another with bitterness, but in a spirit of charity, and in being very condescending to whatever our Sister companion wishes of us.
Two faults against respect and gentleness were pointed out:

1. Great contempt for one another, causing us constant quarreling and quibbling, with the result that we’re never willing to yield to one another; and being rude, disrespectful, and harsh in speaking to one another.

2. To see our Sisters engaged in hard work and not help them, on the pretext that it’s their responsibility, and to be satisfied to work slowly, without hurrying to be of assistance to them.

3. To find fault with everything our Sisters do, and, should they think of asking our advice on something, to rebuff them rudely.

4. To speak too freely and disrespectfully to one another in ordinary conversation.

5. Should it happen that some slight unpleasantness occurs among us, not to excuse one another sufficiently, which may give rise to hurt feelings and murmuring, and affect charity.

The third point was on the means of correcting these faults, and there were eight [sic] of them:

1. Always to see God in our Sisters, to have a high opinion of them, and to consider ourselves unworthy to be in their company.

2. To take a firm resolution to strive for the acquisition of these two virtues.

3. To mortify our strong feelings and to show gentleness, even if we are experiencing the contrary in our hearts.

4. In the lives of the saints, we see that they excelled chiefly in these two virtues and practiced them even toward those who persecuted them. When they noticed any fault in other people, they reproached them only with great reserve and cordiality. If their admonitions weren’t well received, they maintained the same spirit of gentleness and humbled themselves before God, thinking that perhaps it was their fault that others did not benefit from what they told them.

5. To have great respect for the judgment of others and to mortify our own, always yielding to that of others; to correct others with great gentleness, recalling how gentle Our Lord Jesus Christ was with regard to sinners.
(6) Before speaking to our Sisters, to foresee how we should act with them; if something is bothering us, to keep it from being obvious; and if our Sisters are troubled, to support them gently and sympathize with them, without complaining to others of what is happening.

(7) To view our Sisters with deep esteem, bearing in mind that they are persons on whom God has not disdained to cast His eyes in order to attract them to His holy service; esteem begets respect and respect engenders gentleness.

(8) To strive constantly to acquire these virtues in order to destroy the contrary habits.

(9) To foresee the occasions when we can show our Sisters some sign of respect or perform some act of gentleness, and not to neglect any opportunity of doing so.

(10) Above all, to make an effort to acquire gentleness in our hearts, because what is within will appear on the outside; and, to do so, never to harbor any resentment about what goes on among us; but, as soon as we perceive it, go to give satisfaction. In this way, we’ll bring peace to both our Sister’s heart and to our own.

All of the above was said by several of our Sisters, whom Most Honored Father took the trouble to question on the subject of the conference. Then he began to speak in almost the following words: “I thank God, dear Sisters, for the inspirations and knowledge His Goodness has given you on the subject of this present conference; by His mercy they have been clearer and more ample than on the other topics that have been treated for a long time. I thank Him for this with all my heart and beseech Him, who is gentleness, love, and charity, to be pleased, by His divine mercy, to instill in your hearts the truths He has made manifest to your minds. May it please His Infinite Goodness to pour into your hearts that spirit of respect and gentleness which, by His mercy, He has shown you to be so necessary! I think you’re really anxious to apply this to yourselves, dear Sisters. It certainly seems that you have it at heart; you couldn’t have spoken of it with greater understanding.

“But God has it far more at heart—God who asks it of you and who has imparted these things to you only so that you will make
good use of them. By the mercy of God, dear Sisters, theologians
couldn’t have spoken about gentleness and respect better than
you’ve done. If you haven’t spoken with as much skill, you’ve done
so lovingly and in such a way that it’s clear that this comes from
God.

"It was said in the first place that gentleness and respect are most
pleasing to God. Isn’t that true, dear Sisters? And is anything more
pleasing to Him than respect and gentleness, which are the virtues
of the Son of God? As you’ve said so well, He himself taught us
this. ‘Learn from me,’ He said, ‘for I am gentle and humble of
heart.’ That is, dear Sisters, learn from me that I am respectful and
gentle because by humility He means respect, for respect proceeds
from humility. Was there ever a man more gentle and respectful
than Jesus Christ? Oh no! He was gentle and humble toward every­
one.

"He didn’t say, ‘Learn from me how to create worlds or angels’
because we could never do that; that’s proper to Almighty God
alone; but He said, ‘Learn from me that I am gentle and humble;’
and when He told us, dear Sisters, to learn from Him, He meant that
we must learn to be gentle and humble. That’s the hallmark stamped
on those who belong to Him, and you’ve just brought forward the
proof. ‘If you are divided,’ He said to them, ‘you will not be recog­
nized as belonging to me, but by this will people know that you are
my disciples, if you love one another.’ 1 So, rest assured, dear Sis­
ters, that this is pleasing to God, and very much so, and by it people
will know that you’re truly Daughters of Charity, for what is charity
if not love and gentleness? And if you don’t have this love and gen­
tleness, you can’t be Daughters of Charity. As has been stated,
you’d have only the name and habit, and that would be a great mis­
fortune. May God in His infinite mercy be pleased to avert your
Company from the above! Yes, Sisters, you must know that a
Daughter of Charity who is on bad terms with her Sister, who sad­
dens her, vexes her, and persists in that state, making no attempt to
set things right by practicing those two virtues of respect and gen­

1Cf. Jn 13:35. (NAB)
tleness, from that time on she's no longer a Daughter of Charity; no, she isn't; don't even mention her; it's all over as far as she's concerned; she's only wearing the habit. So, Sisters, hold fast to those virtues. That pleases God, and pleases Him so much that it's one of the things He finds most agreeable.

"It was said in the second place that this practice is pleasing to the neighbor; yes, to the neighbor; and is there anything that can please him or her more? Two Sisters are seen to be living together as in a paradise, in harmony, gentleness, and respect. What one wishes, the other wishes; what one likes, the other likes. Is there anything more charming? Isn't that to begin paradise here below? And can the neighbor see anything that pleases him or her more? On the contrary, is there anything more ugly, more brutal—I may even say more diabolical—than not to get along well? For that's how the devils live in hell. They're constantly tearing one another apart because of their rage and hatred for one another. One of the greatest torments of the damned is always to wish evil on one another, to be in a state of irreconcilable hatred and perpetual discord, and never, for a single moment, to agree among themselves.

"Now, rest assured, dear Sisters, that, as long as you're gentle and respectful with one another, your house will be a paradise; but it will stop being so and will become a hell as soon as you're unable to get along with one another and are neither gentle nor respectful. Then you'll be like the demons and damned souls.

"What could scandalize our neighbor more than to see two Daughters of Charity living together in a state of perpetual quarreling and disunion? You may be quite certain that the neighbors will know all about it immediately. They'll hear talk about it, and they'll be shocked—and rightly so—that women who have given themselves to God and renounced all things can be bitter toward one another. Ah! there's nothing more despicable. I know a town where this unfortunate state of affairs occurred; the people were so scandalized that, had it been up to them to send away the Daughters of Charity, they'd never have wanted to see them again. The reason for this, so they say, is that they call themselves Daughters of Charity but aren't so, since they can't get along nor live in peace with one
another. Dear Sisters, God’s glory is diminished if your conduct doesn’t correspond with your name and the dress you wear. That’s a great insult to God! So you see, dear Sisters, the obligation you have to strive all your life to acquire and practice those two virtues in order to be true Daughters of Charity, to please God, and to edify your neighbor.

“One means of doing this is to give yourselves sincerely to God to practice respect and gentleness toward others, and to begin this very moment by taking a firm resolution to do it for your whole life. We must pray earnestly for that; so let’s pray for it all together, dear Sisters, and say with me now, ‘My God, in order to please You, I desire with all my heart to be respectful and gentle toward my Sisters, and I give myself to You once again to strive to acquire and practice these virtues in a way very different from what I have ever done. But, since I’m weak and can accomplish nothing of what I propose for myself without Your special assistance, I entreat You, my God, by Your dear Son Jesus, who is the essence of gentleness and love, to be willing to grant them to me, together with the grace of never doing anything contrary to them.’

“So much for the first means, dear Sisters. The second is that the respect and esteem we must show our Sisters must come from our heart, which is their source, since the source of respect is esteem, and esteem is formed in the heart, and from respect springs gentleness, as you’ve so well remarked—and may God bless the Sister who said it! Why, dear Sisters, would we not have a high opinion of our Sisters, since they are the spouses of Jesus Christ, who has himself lovingly sought them out? ‘But she’s a poor young woman!’ Oh! she’s a soul who has been honored by being sought out by a God; she has consented to this, and He has taken her for His spouse. What higher dignity could she have? If she’s a damsel, she’s a young woman who has laid aside her headdress to wear this contemptible attire and give herself to God in a lowly state of life and of humiliations and difficulties because God has asked it of her. Nothing is more worthy of great esteem. A young woman will come from one hundred or one hundred twenty leagues, from Flanders, or from Holland, to consecrate herself to God in the service of the most
abandoned persons on earth; isn’t that going to martyrdom? Yes, without a doubt. A holy Father has said that anyone who gives himself to God to serve his neighbor and endures willingly all the difficulties he may encounter in this is a martyr. Did the martyrs suffer more than these Sisters? No indeed, they certainly didn’t, because having one’s head cut off is soon over and done with. If they suffered greater torments, these still didn’t last very long; they were quickly terminated by death. But those women who give themselves to God in your Company are sometimes with sick persons full of infection and sores and often noxious body fluids; sometimes with poor children for whom everything must be done; or with poor convicts loaded down with chains and afflictions; and they come under the authority of persons they don’t even know but are bound to obey in every type of ministry. And you wouldn’t consider such persons worthy of respect! They’re far more worthy of it than anything I could say to you, and I see nothing like it. If we saw the spot where a martyr had been, we’d approach it only with respect and kiss it with great reverence; yet, we’re capable of despising our Sisters, who are persons God preserves and enables to exist in a state of martyrdom. Hold them in great esteem, dear Sisters; keep that high opinion of them, no matter what may happen, and look upon them as martyrs of Jesus Christ, since they serve their neighbor for love of Him.

"'But she’s so quick-tempered and peevish!' Well! Sisters, who is without fault? No one in the whole world; no, not a single person. Wasn’t Saint Paul, who was such a great saint, one of the most quick-tempered and irascible men you could meet? He was a fire-brand. Was there anyone more self-willed than Saint Peter? Look all around you, and you won’t see anyone who’s flawless. But take a closer look at yourself and you’ll see many other faults because, Sisters, if we compare ourselves with our neighbor, we’ll see clearly our own faults rather than hers, and will find that all the wrong is on our side.

"'But that Sister is so morose.' Well, Saint Peter wept constantly! If you see that your Sister is sad, you can be edified by thinking that she’s asking God’s forgiveness, and be ashamed that
you’re not more sorry for your sins and are insensitive to the offenses committed against God. ‘But she’s so moody that we never have any joy or consolation in her company!’ Saint Catherine\(^2\) took a woman to live with her who never gave her any consolation, and she served her at the price of great sacrifice, thinking that her own salvation was bound up with that.

“No, Sisters, nothing should diminish our esteem for our Sisters. Everything must be interpreted in the best light. As the Bishop of Geneva says, if there are a hundred aspects of any affair, we should always look at the best side. So, dear Sisters, if anything comes up that seems unfavorable to your Sisters, refuse to believe it. There are some actions about which Superiors should be informed, but that should in no way affect the esteem you must have for your Sisters, for it’s no slight fault to judge someone badly. It’s against charity to judge your Sister. That’s a great evil, dear Sisters, and sometimes it may even be a serious sin, if the matter is important. For instance, I may suspect a person of something that’s a mortal sin, and I mention it to someone else; I’m committing a mortal sin. Don’t fall into that fault, dear Sisters, for it destroys the esteem on which you must establish the respect and gentleness you owe one another.

“The Sister who said she intends to control her emotions and to appear gentle, even though her heart may feel the contrary, spoke very well. But tell me, Sister, don’t you think that this is hypocrisy? Because isn’t it making a show of something other than what you have in your heart?” The Sister said no, and Most Honored Father picked up on that, saying, “No, Sister, that’s not hypocrisy, not at all; on the contrary, it’s both virtuous and prudent not to let our Sister see the wound we feel in our heart from what she has said or done to us, but rather to show her a cheerful face and do all sorts of acts of gentleness!

“But my heart is complaining.’ That doesn’t matter, Sister; it shows quite clearly that you don’t agree to it. Don’t stop, even though your poor heart is saddened and filled with bitterness be-

\(^2\)Saint Catherine of Siena.
cause of the displeasure your Sister's words or actions have caused you. I repeat, don't stop being respectful, friendly, humble, and gentle toward her, and that heart will be consoled by it.

"I think someone also said that it was good always to condescend to the opinions of her Sister. Mon Dieu! dear Sisters, how very right the Sister was who said that, for there's nothing more gracious or easy. A great theologian advises us to condescend, if possible, to whatever our neighbor desires of us, in everything that isn't sinful. A Sister may say, 'Let's go to such and such a place'; it's so easy to reply, 'Right, Sister, let's go,' or, 'Sister, let's do that this way.' 'All right, Sister; that's fine with me.' And even if you sometimes think it could be better done in some other way, agree with her anyway, provided there's nothing wrong in it; and believe me, dear Sisters, your heart will have more sweetness and consolation in condescending than in following your own opinion. And you'll be so much more at peace!

"Attach great importance to each other's opinion, dear Sisters, and yield to it as much as you can because it's a great testimony of respect and an act of humility to believe, as far as possible, that your Sister's judgment is sounder than yours. How pleasing this is to God, and He will know well how to make things succeed in the way they should for His greater glory!

"I also share the view, dear Sisters, that this respect should be manifested externally by some sign, such as greeting or bowing to one another. In the best-regulated religious Orders in the Church of God, the nuns have a Rule that they make a slight inclination toward one another when they meet in the cloister, and, if they fail to do so, they accuse themselves of it and ask for a penance at the time of the visitation.

"Why shouldn't you do this, Sisters, since God has willed that you have the honor of forming a Company in His Church? Shouldn't those who are its members be respected? The person you meet is the spouse of Christ; can you not at least greet her? You should do so especially, Sisters, when you meet in the streets and, in many cases, in the house as well. I don't think it's necessary inside this room, but it's well to do it as you enter. However, if a Sister is
walking across the room and someone meets her, I see no objection to their greeting one another. But if she doesn’t leave her place, or if she gets up to look for or to carry something, and this is a frequent occurrence, there’s no need.

“Parish Sisters who come and go to their room together need not bow every time they meet. But if a Sister comes in from the outside and finds her Sister in the room, well, what’s to prevent her from greeting God, who is in her Sister’s heart, and to prevent the Sister from responding? I think it’s good for you to do this, dear Sisters; it’s a mark of esteem, respect, and love. When a Sister from another house comes here, greet her humbly, cheerfully, and graciously; let her see that you’re happy and contented to see her, and give her a welcome that will please her.

“Take care also not to talk too loudly, but reservedly, and very graciously. Mon Dieu! Some people are so gifted in that way and speak so gently and kindly that what they say makes a strong impression. I’m well aware that, because of faulty vocal organs, some Sisters naturally speak in a loud, harsh tone of voice and are unable to soften it because they don’t have the ability to do so; but at least they should always act in such a way that it’s clear that what they say comes from an affectionate heart.

“You also show respect when two Sisters arrive at a door at the same time and one says to the other, ‘You go first, Sister’ If she declines, then you may go on. But must this be done wherever you run into one another? There are many doors in the house, and maybe you meet someone there ten times a day. My reply, Sisters, is that it’s not necessary on every occasion, but I think it would be well on most. When you meet at a door on leaving the house or entering a church, etc., always follow this practice.

“But when you do this, Sisters, take care not to fall into another fault, by being too ceremonious, which would be contrary to simplicity. You really have to be careful about that. If you meet a Sister at a door and tell her to go ahead of you and she says, ‘You go ahead, Sister,’ you should do it unquestionably. Then you’ll be practicing two virtues: obedience and simplicity. You’ll satisfy both your respect and your duty toward her by offering her precedence, and
you'll perform an act of obedience and simplicity by going ahead when she tells you to do so. Above all, dear Sisters, never meet in the street without acknowledging one another. I already said that to you, and I'm repeating it again.

"At a conference we had some time ago on this same topic, I gave you another means of practicing respect and gentleness from which, by the mercy of God, we've seen very good results. That's why we thought it would be well to give you yet another one, in order to renew yourselves in the practice of the instructions that were then given and to make fresh resolutions. I'm speaking about asking pardon of one another, dear Sisters, whenever something has happened that is ever so little contrary to respect, or has impaired gentleness. When your heart whispers to you that you've said some sharp or biting word, ask pardon because you must, Sisters, you must do it to soothe your Sister's heart and your own also, which will no doubt be pained by this fault. And what I'm advising you to do, dear Sisters, I assure you I've already done today myself, poor wretch that I am! Yesterday I happened to speak abruptly to a priest of our Company in a sharp, harsh manner. I should have spoken to him more gently. I noticed this afterward, and when I heard that he had to go out this morning, I sent word to the front door, asking him not to go into the city until I had spoken to him. When he arrived, I very humbly begged his pardon; so you see, Sisters, what I'm advising you to do, I try to practice myself."

At this, a Sister asked to be told how she should act toward a companion who refused to forgive her, who reproached her for often falling into the same faults, and even ridiculed her. She added that her quick temper often caused her to fail frequently, but since the day she had been rebuffed, she hadn't dared to ask for forgiveness again.

"Sister," said Most Honored Father, "I'm really glad you've made this objection to me, and I'm going to answer it. But, before I do, I must say that the Sister who acted that way behaved very badly. Mon Dieu! She committed a serious fault. To have ridiculed her Sister kneeling in front of her to ask pardon, and to say, 'I could
not care less about this asking pardon,' is a very serious fault! She should accuse herself of it and have the courage to confess it!

"Let me tell you, Sister—I'm not speaking to you, however, I'm speaking in general—that some people accuse themselves all their lives and never amend; no one ever sees them take a single step forward, never correcting themselves of anything, always hasty, always troublesome, always making blunders; and that's a little hard on those who have to live with them. Nevertheless, it's very wrong to rebuff them. When one Sister kneels down, the other should do the same and say, 'I'm sorry, Sister; I'm the one who, because of my bad temper, have caused you to be annoyed,' or, 'It's my own pride,' or something like that, depending on the subject, and she should never find fault with her Sister. Mon Dieu! What a great fault! We should always put ourselves in the wrong and believe that it's because of us that our neighbor is angry or has committed some other fault. As for those who unfortunately might not amend—I'm not referring to you, Sister, or to anyone in particular—they mustn't stop trying. You may rest assured, dear Sisters, that if you do so with genuine regret for your fault, by the grace of God you will improve and, if you see that you're not improving, then I'd advise you to have recourse to penance, that is, to impose some punishment on yourself that's a little hard because, despite our repugnance to asking forgiveness, we do become accustomed to it, and sometimes it becomes very easy. But, when we do so in a spirit of humility, and join a penance to it, then we infallibly benefit from it.

"A man had a very bad and dangerous habit of cursing on every occasion. On one of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, God inspired him to go to confession in a church of Our Lady, and he was so touched that he took the resolution never to swear again. He was given a penance of giving a sou to the poor every time he swore. When he reached home he began to swear again. Immediately he took a sou from his pocket and gave it to a poor person. Another curse, another sou; however, since there was no poor person around, he put it in his other pocket to be given away at the first opportunity. And so it went. In the end, seeing that his money was disappearing, and since perhaps he didn't have too much of it,
corrected himself and, by the mercy of God, became such a fine man that he avoided like he would avoid hell persons who swore, and he couldn’t tolerate them.

"Likewise, dear Sisters, when you’ve saddened your Sister or given her bad example by some habitual fault, impose a penance on yourself; for example, deprive yourself of half your dinner, if you can do so without becoming too weak, or take the discipline or put on the penitential girdle, kiss the floor, deprive yourself of talking for a certain time—unless someone asks you something—then you’ll see, dear Sisters, that in a short time you’ll become humble, respectful, gentle, pleasant, and very mellow. I know full well that this will be a little difficult for some and that perhaps there are persons who are rather hard to get along with, but I also know that, by the mercy of God, it’s not the majority and that, among those who have these imperfections to contend with, a good number have improved since the last conference we had on this topic. If, however—God forbid!—someone unfortunately had no intention of correcting herself, she’d be much better off outside the Company. If she remained in it any longer, she’d greatly dishonor God, whom she had promised to serve, and would scandalize her neighbor, whom she’s supposed to edify. If you become aware of this, dear Sisters, weep over this poor Sister, sigh, do penance, and ask God’s pardon for her and for those Sisters to whom this disaster has happened. Please do it from this very moment, dear Sisters, and, for that purpose, imitate me and say with all your heart, ‘My God, we very humbly ask your pardon for our Sisters and for ourselves, who have been so wretched as to have become angry with one another and failed in the respect You so lovingly recommended to us, and in the gentleness that is so much in harmony with the title of Daughter of Charity which, by Your Will, we have the honor to bear. We entreat You, by the perfect gentleness of Your very dear Son, to be pleased to eradicate those faults and to grant all of us the grace to be, from now on, of one heart and one soul for and in Your love.’

"That’s all I had to say to you, dear Sisters, on the subject of the present conference, reduced to four principal practices, the first being to fervently ask this gentleness and respect of God, to give your-
selves to Him for that purpose, and to take an inviolable resolution to do so; second, to manifest these virtues exteriorly by greeting one another; third, to ask pardon of one another; and fourth, to impose a penance on yourselves if you fail.

"May God in His goodness, dear Sisters, be pleased to pour forth abundantly on you His Spirit, which is nothing other than love, gentleness, graciousness, and charity, so that, by the practice of these virtues, you may do all things in the way He wants you to do them, for His glory, your salvation, and the edification of your neighbor! And I, although the harshest and least gentle of men, relying on the mercy of God, will still pronounce the words of blessing on you. I beseech Him with all my heart that, as I am uttering them, He may be pleased to fill you with His holy graces. Benedictio Dei Patris. . . ."

28. - CONCEALING AND EXCUSING THE FAULTS OF THE SISTERS

October 22, 1646

Conference of October 22, 1646, on the obligation of Daughters of Charity not to blame the Sisters with whom they are living for the faults that slip into their practices.

The first point concerned the reasons for concealing the faults of our Sisters from those who shouldn't know them.

On this it was said:

(1) We cannot reveal the imperfections of anyone whomsoever without offending God.

(2) That is contrary to charity and, therefore, if we do things contrary to this virtue, we must no longer be called Daughters of Charity.

(3) It's a source of disedification; we're the cause of people having less esteem for the Sister of whom we have spoken badly, and
women who might want to join our Company will be turned away from it on seeing our lack of forbearance and charity.

(4) Our disrespect for our Sisters falls back on ourselves, as if we were to throw a stone into the air and it fell back on our own head.

On this point Most Honored Father said, “How true that is, Sisters, and how well our Sister has spoken! For how much esteem can people have for a Daughter of Charity who is disrespectful to her Sister and tears her down? Alas! they can’t have any; and even though at the time we seem to agree with what she says and are even glad to hear it, nevertheless, when we think about it afterward, and the feeling that led us to listen to her has passed, we’ll say, ‘This Sister must have very little virtue, since she criticizes and maligns her Sister, instead of excusing and bearing with her.’ So our Sister is excused and the other condemned, and just as if someone were so foolish as to spit up into the sky, the spittle would fall back on her face, so the blame she wanted to fall on her Sister will fall back on herself. Pay close attention to what will be said on this topic, Sisters; it’s one of the most important we have to deal with because it’s the means by which the devil tries to ruin you. I hope, however, that the Holy Spirit, who inspired us to consider it, will enlighten your minds and inflame your hearts to realize its importance and adopt its practices. Well then, in nomine Domini, in nomine Domini, in nomine Domini! Let’s continue, please.”

(5) As Our Lord said to His disciples, “If you love one another, you will be recognized as my disciples,” so, if we love one another we’ll bear charitably with the faults of our Sisters, and, by that, people will know that we’re true Daughters of Charity.

(6) If we excuse those faults of our Sisters, we’ll win their trust, and they’ll be able to correct them with better results than if we mentioned them aloud or rebuked them bitterly.

(7) The habit of excusing ourselves causes us to commit many faults, which we don’t notice immediately but only later when we examine ourselves; this sometimes troubles our conscience and prevents us from benefiting from our meditations and other spiritual exercises.
(8) Our Lord has made us responsible for bearing one another’s burdens, and even taught us how to do it during His own lifetime, and this practice will promote union among us.

(9) Nothing impairs charity and union more than a lack of forbearance, and it’s an offense against the whole Company if, when people see us failing in it, they think the Company doesn’t practice this virtue.

(10) When we accuse our Sisters, and our excessive self-love and conceit lead us to impute to others faults of which we ourselves are guilty, that’s a lack of humility and knowledge of our own weakness.

(11) It’s a lesson the Eternal Father gave us through His Son, who practiced this virtue throughout His life, and even to His death when He made excuses for the ignorance of those who were crucifying Him.

(12) By the practice of this virtue, we fulfill the law of Jesus Christ, which is given only to those who tolerate the faults of their neighbor.

(13) Our Regulations require that we practice this virtue; this seems to be a serious obligation so as not to lead a disorderly life contrary to our Rules.

The second point dealt with how to conceal and excuse our Sisters’ faults. The following observations were made:

(1) When we see our Sisters commit a fault, we should think that it’s through inadvertence, that they didn’t realize they were doing anything wrong, and that we ourselves fail much more frequently and do so deliberately.

(2) If they’re new to the Company, we can say that they’re not yet used to the Community and are still following the maxims of the world; and we must believe that this distresses them a great deal.

(3) If they are older Sisters, let’s bear in mind that we have to work at this all our lives and that God allowed the saints themselves to fall sometimes; this is so that each of us will realize that of ourselves we can do nothing but sin.

(4) When a Sister comes to us to complain of her Sister companion, it will be well not to listen to her, or to change the conversation.
On this point, Most Honored Father said to the entire assembly, “That’s a good means of chopping off this accursed sin at the root, dear Sisters, because, as people say, if there were no receiver of stolen goods there would be no thief. Likewise, if there were no listeners, there would be no slanderers. O Sisters! never listen to them, never! Your Sister may come to you with her complaints; perhaps the poor thing is in a bad mood; that passes, and then she wishes she hadn’t said anything to you. Nevertheless, her words would have made an impression on you, and you’ll have a bad opinion of another Sister, who perhaps is quite innocent. Well, there’s a lot to think about here, Sisters, because the person who complains is often mistaken, and the one who is accused wasn’t thinking of doing anything wrong, as has been very well remarked. The first Sister was in no position either to see or hear what she thought she saw or heard, so, instead of charitably advising her Sister, when she sees you she’s quite at ease to unburden herself to you.

“Don’t let that happen, Sisters! Although, by the mercy of God, I’m certainly not aware of such great faults among you, they can, nevertheless, arise. The devil, who is very clever, begins with petty misrepresentations, little grumblings, and minor complaints, which end in serious disagreements and glaring detraction. For you see, Sisters, the prince of demons, the chief enemy of the works of God, who fears the good this Company will be doing, has undertaken the task of destroying it, and has commissioned a special demon to tempt you. This demon has nothing else to do; he observes you from every angle to discover the place where you can be assaulted. Just as God has given you a Guardian Angel especially to protect you, this demon exists expressly to destroy you, but he’ll do so only through your lack of forbearance and the complaints that ensue from it, soon to be followed by detractions, then by serious conflicts. What holds up this building? The foundation stone supports the one above it, the latter supports another, and each stone goes on supporting another; in this way the whole building is reinforced. May God, in His infinite goodness, be pleased to preserve us from such a misfortune! But to prevent it absolutely, never listen to complaints. That’s the means your Sister has just mentioned and it never fails.
“‘But, Monsieur,’ someone may say to me, ‘how shall I get my Sister to be silent? Shall I tell her she’s out of line? She’ll be annoyed at that.’ Sisters, let me tell you a means that has just occurred to me, which I might forget if I waited until later. It’s to make no reply at all but rather to kneel down and ask God to send your Sister some thought contrary to what she has said to you. When she sees you in that position, she’ll come to her senses much more quickly than if you had said something to her.

“Recently I was thinking to myself, ‘What could keep this Company from surviving?’ All that came to my mind was that despicable vice, for, as far as what is called ‘the great evil’ is concerned, by the grace of God I don’t see it. Nor will it be for lack of excellent persons who love their vocation, nor the fault of the people because they love you and will always readily welcome you; it’s too much in their interest that the poor be served. No, it will happen because of you yourselves, if you don’t soon set to work at it seriously. That’s why you should take the resolution, beginning right now, to wage war courageously against it, Sisters. Every one of you must have a horror of this enemy. And if there’s anyone who doesn’t feel disposed to resist him, I’d advise her to leave the Company rather than be a scandal in it. If half of you were tainted by this evil—which is a very great one, Sisters, because it’s not always a simple imperfection but sometimes it’s a sin, even a mortal sin, as when you reveal the serious sin of a Sister, you yourselves commit a grievous sin—I repeat then, Sisters, if half of you were habitually unable to tolerate the faults of others, and were guilty of detraction in their regard, and if you were absolutely unwilling to rid yourself of this vice, I would advise that half to withdraw so as not to harm the rest of the Company because, Sisters, you’ll be responsible before God not only for the evil you committed, but also for that which you caused or for a lessening of the good that would have been much greater were it not for your bad example.

“Be very careful about this, Sisters, for some Sister among you may perhaps be lost for misusing the graces God gives her here in this house, for giving cause to others to offend God, or for hindering their greater perfection. And perhaps she might have been saved in
her own home, where God wouldn’t have asked so much of her. In God’s name, Sisters, be very careful about this, and never forget the means just mentioned by our Sister. Let’s go on with the means.”

(5) It’s well for us to look at ourselves to see whether we are not the cause of the faults committed by our Sisters.

(6) Not to accuse our Sisters to our confessors, to whom we sometimes mention our differences.

At this, our venerable Father, intervening again, said, “Oh! never, Sisters, never to confessors! Bon Dieu! That would be a sacrilege! And if you do it outside of confession, it’s detraction. To go and blacken the character of your Sister with a confessor is odious. During confession, speak about yourself and never of anyone else. Theologians hold that if one can’t confess a sin without making known the person with whom one has committed it, it’s better not to confess it. Charity is the queen of virtues, Sisters; is there anything that wounds it so deeply as to sully the reputation of our neighbor? Confession is necessary, but it’s subordinate. Charity comes first, and if charity may be wounded by confession, give up going, for it’s only the handmaid of charity, and must not be made to its detriment. Charity is supreme.

“If you have something against your Sister, tell those who should know it and who can remedy it; tell your Superior or your Superioress, but never your confessors, who are there only to correct you for the sins you confess and to give you absolution, but not to hear about what goes on among you. I say this to you once more, in line with the theologians who were the first to put it forward: it’s better not to confess than to reveal someone else’s sin in confession; instead of receiving the merit of the sacrament, you’d add a sacrilege to your sins.

“If you do it outside of confession, alas, Sisters! you are mentioning them to a man subject to the same failings as yourselves, who has no obligation to you to keep it secret and, after leaving you, will have the power and liberty to repeat what you had said to him. And to what does this sometimes give rise? Alas, Sisters! we’ve seen some who, because of an attachment to their confessors in this way, have been lost. Not, by God’s mercy, that anything bad hap-
pened, but the confessor liked one Sister more than another and always considered her to be in the right. If she told him about some dispute or disagreement between them, he’d say that the other Sister was to blame, and he never brought them any peace. What a useful remark our Sister made! Watch out for that, Sisters; don’t ever abuse confession, always bear in mind the obligations of charity, and never say anything outside of confession. The confessors to whom you reveal your Sisters’ faults know full well that you shouldn’t be mentioning them. If they’re in a place where people are talking about you, alas! they’ll say quite freely, ‘These Sisters snap each other’s heads off; you may think they’re worth something; if you knew them, you’d see how it is; they always have a bone to pick with one another; they tell the first person they meet all about their differences, with no charity or forbearance. I’m tired of hearing it.’ That’s how your confessors will treat you, Sisters, if you don’t have the necessary discretion in dealing with them. You’ll lose your good name, you’ll scandalize one another, and you’ll do harm to the Company.”

(7) Should it happen that the poor aren’t served on time or haven’t received their medicine, don’t blame our Sister, but try to excuse her; and do the same if a Lady is displeased with her.

(8) If we have a little love of God, it will be easy for us to put up with the imperfections of our neighbor; and if we want to advance in virtue, we’ll be glad when those little opportunities arise, so that we may strive to improve.

(9) When a person has something to say about a Sister, we’ll try to excuse her, saying that she was taken by surprise and that, if God didn’t restrain us all, we’d commit far more faults.

(10) Reflect that when we justify ourselves at the expense of our Sisters, we often change, more to our own advantage, the way things appear, and in this way we offend against the truth.

(11) If our Sisters should let slip a hasty remark, instead of judging that they have done something wrong, we should look into ourselves and see whether it was because of us that they committed the fault and whether we might have done worse than they did if they had treated us in the way and as rudely as we treated them, and by
these reflections, always try to excuse them in our own minds. If we can’t do so with those who have witnessed their faults, it’s well to justify their intention.

(12) Remember that, if we bear with our Sisters by concealing or excusing their faults, God will allow them to practice a similar charity toward us, and there’s good reason for us to acknowledge that each one of us has great need of it.

(13) Try to overlook the faults of others and, in order to do this, excuse them and believe that they’ve acted inadvertently and with no ill will.

(14) Should it happen that we indicate to our neighbor that we’ve been offended by what she’s said or done, ask her forgiveness for this as soon as possible, and let her see that we feel no resentment.

(15) When a Sister’s fault is obvious to outsiders—be it the Ladies or the physician—we should conceal it, if we can do so without lying; if not, we should consider ourselves obliged to excuse her and to try unobtrusively to make amends for the fault. Since we are only one body, each of the members must put right and make up for the damage the other has done, but without letting it be known, if we can—not even to the Sister herself—unless it may prove useful for some other occasion.

(16) In order to commit ourselves to keeping silent about the faults of our Sister, we should remember that mentioning them is fatal to her.

Our venerable Father laid great stress on that remark: “How well you’re speaking without even realizing it, Sister, for it’s so true that those who deprive persons of their honor kill them! Legal experts tell us we have two sorts of life: physical life and the civic life which is our good name. The Daughter of Charity who tears down her Sister deprives her of this good reputation; she takes from her the favor she enjoyed from those who knew her, and causes her to die in their estimation. They take no further notice of her, just as people take no further notice of a man condemned by the law to civil death, which is banishment; he is deprived of his honor. In the same way, a person who has been slandered is deprived of her honor in the opinion of those to whom it is mentioned.
"We see a good Daughter of Charity who looks after poor persons very well, carries out her duties at the right time, and fully satisfies the Ladies. Everyone is edified by her, and you go and say, 'She's so bad-tempered! We can't live with her; she's not all that she appears to be.' You kill her, you deprive her of the reputation by which she existed in the estimation of those people. That's why our Sister spoke so well, and yet, she didn't realize what she was trying to say.

"Reflect on all that; whenever you see yourselves inclined to speak ill of another, think in your own minds, 'I'm going to say that, and no one is aware of it; I'll gratify my own anger but I'm also going to kill my Sister; I'm going to deprive her of her honor, and from now on her reputation will be ruined.' Sisters, if you had these reflections, I don't think you'd ever go any further. You were quite right in saying, Sister, that to make someone's faults public is to kill her, and yet you weren't thinking about what that implied. Well then, in nomine Domini!

"The third point deals with the benefits that will accrue to us, each one in particular and the Company in general, if we're faithful to the practice of the virtue of forbearance, that is, if we conceal and excuse the faults of our Sisters and accuse ourselves instead."

On this point it was said:

(1) It's a means of acquiring humility, by which we'll draw God's graces on our Community, give good example to our neighbor, and help our Sisters to appreciate their vocation, seeing that we bear with one another and put ourselves in the wrong rather than our Sister.

(2) God will be glorified by our mutual forbearance because it will prevent envy from arising among us, by which He's so often offended.

(3) We are kept in check by disregard of ourselves because, when we see a fault in our Sisters, we'll humble ourselves, recognizing that, without the grace of God, we'd be much worse.

(4) Our neighbor will be edified by it; we'll carry out our spiritual exercises with a stronger sense of the presence of God, greater
cheerfulness, and a purer intention, and we'll love one another more.

(5) Great union, harmony, peace, and friendship will result in general and, in particular, great peace of mind, which is so necessary to obtain perseverance.

(6) Peace will be created in our Company from this reciprocal forbearance of our Sisters and ourselves. We'll mortify the passions of our heart, which might try to rebel against this virtue; we'll become more restrained in our conversations; by our example, we'll instill this virtue into the hearts of newcomers, who may not perhaps be aware of it, and when we're faithful to it, then our Company will be truly a Company of Charity.

(7) By the practice of this virtue in the whole body, God will be glorified because in this way we'll honor the teaching and example of His Son when He was on earth.

(8) The merit of similar virtues practiced by Our Lord will be lavished on us if we practice them for love of Him.

(9) If we begin to practice these virtues of forbearance and excusing our Sisters, we'll form only one body and one same spirit, and thereby will have much greater power to draw down the graces of God that we need in order to strengthen and affirm our ministry in the service of God and of persons who are poor.

(10) The practice of this virtue will always keep our minds peaceful and humble, make us congenial with our neighbor, and greatly assist us to serve him or her; even in this world, we'll be able to share, in a certain sense, the reward promised by Our Lord to peacemakers because it will be easier for us to place ourselves in the presence of God and to remain there.

Most of the Sisters had something to contribute at this conference and said substantially part of what we've put down here, using the notes several had made on their meditation. When they had finished, Most Honored Father began to speak in almost the following words: "It's getting late, Sisters, and you've grasped the importance of this subject so well that it's unnecessary for me to speak about it at any great length. You yourselves have recognized the evils caused by these faults, the scandal they give to your neighbor, the
offense against God, the disorder they cause among you, the great
disunion they create, how they disrupt the peace and make you irritat­
ing to yourselves. How happy you’d be without them! It would
be paradise if you knew how to deal with it properly. Where there’s
charity, God abides. An important person has said that God’s clois­
ter is charity. He enjoys being there, His palace of delight is there,
it’s the dwelling place in which He is well pleased. Be charitable, be
kind, have the spirit of forbearance, and God will live in your midst.
You will be His cloisters, you’ll have Him in your home, and you’ll
have Him in your hearts.

"Now, by His mercy, dear Sisters, there’s reason to hope that
you want this, and that you’re striving wholeheartedly to acquire
this charity. That’s why, given how well-disposed you seem to be,
I’ll make no further attempt to show you how productive it is for us
to conceal and excuse the faults of our neighbor, since God himself
has shown you sufficiently the advantages that will accrue from this
to each one of you in particular and to the Company in general.
We’ll just briefly go over the means God gives us to strive for His
love because, Sisters, we have to work judiciously at that.

"The first means is to ask it of God. Yes, Sisters, we must ask it
of God, but it should be with all our heart; and while I’m speaking to
you now, lift up your hearts to ask it of Him, and take the resolution
never to let an opportunity pass of excusing your Sister, of bearing
with her, and of doing your utmost to help her, without seeking your
own interest.

"The second means has been mentioned but, so you’ll remember
it better, I’ll speak of it again. It’s to kneel down when a Sister
speaks ill of another. That’s a great means! You won’t say a word,
but she’ll see very clearly what you mean. She’ll think about what
she has said, and at that very moment will feel remorse for her fault
and perhaps, by God’s grace, will determine never to fall into it
again. You’ll also cause those who used to listen willingly to her to
be touched by your example, and they’ll be very careful not to imi­
tate her. By the very act of kneeling down, you yourself will be
humbled, and in your heart you’ll excuse both the Sister who was
malign ed and the one who committed the fault. ‘Alas!’ you may
say, 'what about us? This Sister has so many good qualities, and the
demon never stops assailing her. If God didn’t protect me from him,
what would become of me?’ Rest assured, Sisters, that the demon
has God’s permission to try your virtue in this matter, and he’ll
never lose an opportunity to tempt you. That’s why you must al­
ways be on your guard.

‘Should you ever lapse into slander, murmuring, or detraction,
get hold of yourselves and say, ‘Wretched creature, what have you
done? You’ve let yourself go over to the enemy; you’ve killed your
Sister; you’ve ruined her reputation, you’ve scandalized the Sisters
to whom you’ve spoken; what will they think of her now?’ And at
that very instant, Sisters, so that the bad impression caused by your
words may go no further, and also because charity demands that we
contribute to the good reputation of our neighbor, at that very in­
stant, I repeat, and without further delay, go find your Sister, knee­
at her feet, and say, ‘Sister, I’m here at your feet to ask your forgive­
ness. I’ve been so mean as to make such and such a remark about
you; please forgive me and ask God to be merciful to me.’ After
that, go find the others and say to them, ‘Alas! pray for me; I’ve
been so petty as to have allowed myself to say such a thing about my
Sister! In the name of God, don’t be disedified by it, but ask God to
be merciful to me.’

‘The third means is, when we’re in a group of persons where a
Sister is being maligned, to ask God to touch the heart of the poor
Sister who’s speaking to us, to go in spirit to heaven and to constrain
God, so to speak, to give her some good impulse, to take some good
thought from the Heart of Jesus, to ask the Holy Spirit to give her an
inspiration appropriate to the situation in which she finds herself
and—I keep going back to this—to get down on her knees. If the
place is suitable, and nobody sees her, why not? But if the place is
inappropriate, or if she doesn’t feel moved to do so, then she
shouldn’t say a word, but lift her thoughts to God and ask Him with
all her heart to touch the heart of her Sister. I don’t think it advisable
to say anything to the Sister, for she may not be in the mood to hear
it. She has just been annoyed at that moment and might become
more agitated if someone said something to her. It’s far better to
turn to God that it may please His Goodness to give her the necessary dispositions and to edify her by your silence and example, for no words have as much power.

"No, Sisters, I’ve told you before and I tell you again, that nothing we can say by way of exhorting our neighbor to do her duty is as strong as example; sooner or later, you’ll see the results. Blessed Jean de Montmirail was one of the great noblemen of the Court and Constable of France. He defeated the English before Compiègne and was one of the greatest landowners and most powerful men in the kingdom; his eldest son married the daughter of the King of England. After the father had labored long on behalf of the crown of France, he wanted to become a monk. ‘Father Prior,’ he said to the Prior of the convent he had chosen, ‘I will carry out faithfully everything you do here; I will rise at the same time you do; I will eat in the refectory as you do, and so on for the rest. But one thing bothers me and that is that I’ll never be able to clean my own shoes. I sincerely hope I can manage everything else, but on that point, I admit my weakness. Give orders to have someone clean my shoes and return them to me every morning.’

"The Prior, who had the spirit of God and clearly foresaw that Blessed Jean wouldn’t remain in that state of mind very long, said, ‘By all means, Monsieur, that’s a mere trifle; I’ll give a Brother charge of that, and he won’t fail to do it.’ And so it was done, and every day the shoes were brought to his room. Since this went on longer than the Prior had expected, he himself picked up the shoes of Blessed Jean, cleaned them, and brought them back every morning. One day the monk saw him and, since he wasn’t quite certain who it was, he looked more closely to be sure. He began to think, ‘What, wretched man! Your Prior is cleaning your shoes; you want to be a monk, but what are your dispositions? You need a valet. You don’t know how to clean your own shoes, and your Superior is cleaning them!’ In this state of mind he went on his knees before the Prior,

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Jean de Montmirail (1165-1217), an impetuous and loyal knight in the service of King Philippe II Auguste of France, converted to a less worldly life and established a hostel near his castle for persons with every type of illness, but especially for lepers. In 1210 he left his wife and children to become a Cistercian monk of Longport Abbey in the Soissons diocese.
entreated him not to do it any more, publicly asked pardon, did penance in private for it, and afterward always cleaned his own shoes. You see by this, Sisters, the force of example.

"But this Sister is lazy; she doesn't get up with the rest of you! Well, don't say anything to her. But she does nothing; she won't even sweep the room. Then you sweep it. If she doesn't make her bed, you make it. All the work she's supposed to do but doesn't, you do it; and you'll see that she won't let you do it for long. But, above all, when a Sister criticizes someone, turn to God without saying a word, and you'll see that she'll soon keep silence; for, if there were never any Sisters to listen, there never would be any to complain.

"A fourth means—I'm coming back to it to recommend it to you—is not to discuss your Sisters with your confessors. In the name of God, Sisters, never discuss your disagreements with them; be respectful concerning them. As I've told you, that can't be done in confession, and, outside confession, it's slander. Conceal your little differences of opinion as well as you can, except from those who should know about them. Above all, bear one another's burdens in peace.

"The fifth means to prevent complaints and to help each one to correct herself is, I think, not to reprove one another. I've already told you not to reproach the Sister who speaks ill of someone; I'm now going further: never reproach anyone. The Jesuits, who are wise men if there are any wise men in this world, used to correct each other in the early days of their Institute; since they were still committing faults, they decided to try another means, namely, not to give any reproofs, but to inform the Superior about them, and only in the case of a conspicuous fault. They noticed that this brought better results than when they used to admonish one another, so they resolved not to do it any more, and they don't; so I think that, if we adopt this practice, we'll infallibly see good results.

"But how can we do that, Monsieur? This Sister is always talking and never keeps silence.' By keeping it yourself at the appointed time and letting her talk.

"But she does nothing whatsoever; I have all the trouble and responsibility; if I go on like this I'll become ill.' Keep going, do ev-
erything she should be doing, and you'll see that she won't let you
do so for very long.

" 'She didn't make her bed all week long.' Make it for a whole
month—for two months, if necessary; before the month is over,
you'll see an improvement. If, however, there is none, don't stop
doing it.

"We'll try this means for three months; unless I tell you other­
wise, please don't reprove anyone about anything for three months
except by example. In three months we'll have another conference
on this subject, and you can tell us the results. During those three
months, take care to examine your conscience on this before dinner
and supper. Let each one see whether she has said anything against
her Sister, and whether there has been any grumbling. Do that, Sis­
ters, give one another good example, and don't say a word. Don't
say a word, but don't act disdainfully, Oh no! certainly not. Still
more, don't scold, for that would be a great imperfection. The in­
structions you're given aren't intended merely to prevent imperfec­
tions. I'd never ask you to do your Sister's duties in order to give her
good example if I thought you'd do them grudgingly or fail in cor­
diality. Oh no! I mean you should invite her to meals at the proper
time, converse with her about the practices of your Rule when
there's time to do so, take reading with her, talk to her during meals,
encourage her to come to recreation, show her every sort of friendli­
ness and respect, and ask her advice when appropriate. Believe me,
Sisters, a Sister would be very little disposed to virtue if, after such
an example, she didn't improve. Be faithful to this practice; always
be reserved, cheerful, and in a good mood, even when the pain she
causes you makes that difficult because, Sisters, she won't see you
behaving like that very long before she begins to do even more than
you'd desire.

"The sixth and last means are confession and Holy Communion.
These are great means, Sisters; they'll draw down on you without
fail graces sufficient to help you to bear with and excuse the faults
of others and to correct yourselves. Familiarize yourselves with
them, Sisters, in the name of God. Have you noticed that you have
fallen? Have recourse to holy confession, go to Holy Communion
every time God in His goodness allows it. 'But I have no inclination
for it.' Never mind! don’t stop going. It’s God who’s calling you.
There’s no remedy more efficacious against the illnesses of our
souls. That’s where we must go to fortify ourselves; that’s where we
must go to tell our troubles, for there we’ll find the True Physician
who knows the best remedies. That’s where we must go to study
love, forbearance, graciousness, good example to our neighbor, and
all the other virtues we need. Go then, dear Sisters, when Jesus
Christ calls you there, and don’t consider whether you’re attracted
there by a perceptible fervor because your enemy will strive with all
his might to prevent you from approaching them, in order to deprive
you of the graces God wants to impart to you to help you to begin to
practice the divine virtues of His Son. All together let’s ask Him for
those virtues of charity and forbearance, which He practiced during
His lifetime and which I’m now going to ask Him for you.

"My Lord and my God, Jesus Christ my Savior, the most amiable
and loving of all men, You who practiced charity and forbearance
incomparably more than all people together, You who
received the most wrongs and insults and had the least resentment,
please listen to the very humble prayer we offer You, that You may
be pleased to impart to the Company the spirit of charity with which
You were aflame, and the spirit of gentleness and forbearance You
had for Your enemies, so that, by the practice of these virtues, the
eternal plans of the adorable Will of God for it may be fulfilled, and
it may glorify God by imitating You and, by its example, win souls
to Your service. Above all else, my God, may this Company, by
mutual forbearance, be pleasing to You. My God, do not consider
the voice of the sinner who speaks to You, but look at the hearts of
our poor Sisters, present and absent, who desire this and who ask
You for it through my lips. My God, I ask you to please grant them
to the Company through Your most Holy Mother, through all the
Saints who glorify You in heaven and by all those living on earth,
through the Guardian Angels of our poor Sisters, and by their desire
to be faithful to Your graces. My God, I hope You will grant me this
grace, wretched sinner that I am, although I have often acted con-
trary to the precepts You have given me and the inspirations You
have sent me for the practice of these virtues. Filled with confidence in Your infinite mercy, I will not fail to pronounce the words of blessing on this Company, and, at the same time I utter them, I hope that You will fill their hearts with Your spirit of charity. *Benedictio Dei Patris*...”

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29. - RELATIONS AMONG THE SISTERS AND WITH PERSONS OUTSIDE THE COMPANY

February 2 [1647]

Conference of February 2 on the reasons why Sister Servants should carry out faithfully their duties toward priests, the Ladies of their parishes, and their Sister companions; also, the relations of Sister companions with their Sister Servants and with one another, and what they should do to perform their duties well in every respect.

After reading the title of the conference, Most Honored Father began to speak in almost the following words: “Sisters, this is a very important topic, much more important than I can express. We’re doing today what Saint Paul did in his day when, writing to the Christians of the early Church, he taught them how the husband should live with his wife, the father with his child, the master with his servants, and servants, both men and women, with their masters and mistresses. So, Sisters, this conference is to teach you how you should act with your confessors in the parishes where you are living, with those who are assigned to visit the sick whom you serve, with the Ladies who are Officers of the Charity and, lastly, how you should act with one another, that is, the Sister Servant with her Sister, and vice versa. And if it pleases the Divine Goodness to bless...”

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Conference 29. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Élisabeth Hellot.

1In her letter to Saint Vincent of April 21, 1647 (cf. III, 178), Saint Louise was probably alluding to this conference.

2At this period of the Company, Community houses, especially in the parishes in Paris and its environs, had only two Sisters, one of whom acted as Sister Servant, and another who was referred to as “the Sister companion.”
what will be said about it, as I am hoping, you will greatly benefit from it.

"I think it would be well to add the physician to the list; however, as this subject is very broad and would require not just one conference—actually, each point would merit more than one—I'm of the opinion that, taking this into account, together with the fact that it's getting late and some of you have come from a distance, it would be well to deal with only one point today, namely, how you should act with regard to the priests who visit the sick. And we'll continue this topic at the next conference.

"Sister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this subject?"

The Sister said that it was necessary to treat priests with the utmost respect, the Ladies with the greatest submission, and one's Sister with the greatest cordiality, but it sometimes happened that a Sister was of one opinion and her Sister Servant was of another, and a slight altercation sometimes resulted from this disagreement. She entreated Most Honored Father to do her the charity of telling her what to do in such circumstances.

"Yes, Sister, certainly," he replied. "I'll give an answer both for you personally and for all our Sisters here present, as well as for those who are absent; someone can tell them because this can happen to anyone. I'll begin where I should end, which is how Sisters are to live with one another. So, Sisters, when these differences of opinion arise, the Sister should yield to the Sister Servant, unless she informs Mademoiselle or the Superior of the matter. That's what is done in well-regulated Communities.

"Superiors or Superioresses have their Councillors, to whom they submit matters. When they've heard their opinions, they follow them if they think it well to do so, for a Superior or Superioress has the authority to act contrary sometimes to the advice of their Councillors. If they think it more advisable to act otherwise they may say, 'We'll think about this again,' and, if they judge it necessary, they may act contrary to what they have been advised to do. At the time of the visitation, the Officers may tell the Visitor that, on a

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3"Mademoiselle" is Saint Louise; "the Superior" mentioned here is Saint Vincent.
certain day, the Superioress asked their advice on a particular matter, and they agreed for such and such a reason that the thing should be done, but that it wasn’t done; and the Visitor will make enquiries and order what he thinks advisable.

“This may happen when you are together, Sisters. If a Sister doesn’t agree with what her Sister Servant proposes to her, she’s at liberty to give her reasons once or twice; but, if the Sister Servant doesn’t accept them, then all she can do is submit. If the house is conveniently located and the matter isn’t urgent, I certainly think the Sister Servant shouldn’t proceed any further until she has spoken with Mlle Le Gras or, in her absence, with the Sister Servant here. If this happens in a distant place, it will be well for her to write to Mademoiselle as soon as possible and say, ‘This matter came up; a Sister here was of such and such an opinion and I was of another. I’ve acted according to my way of thinking; please let me know if I did the right thing.’ It seems to me that this is what should be done, Sisters.

“Now, while we’re on this topic, I still want to tell you how a Sister and her Sister Servant should get along with one another. In the first place, I think that to do this well they should live in such a way that no one ever knows which one is the Sister companion and which is the Sister Servant. The latter should never seek to be first, to be better dressed, or to take the best place. They should always go just as they happen to come; in that way it will sometimes be one, sometimes the other, who is first, and outsiders will never know which one is in charge.

“They must also have great respect for one another. Therefore, the Sister Servant must be convinced that her Sister is much better than herself, and far more capable of occupying the position she holds. That, Sisters, should be our aim, namely, always to consider that someone else is worth much more than we are. And no truly good person thinks otherwise; no, a man isn’t really a good man unless he thinks he’s the most wicked man alive and that every other person is more worthy than he is. Believe me, Sisters, if we don’t think this of ourselves, we’re in great danger. I tell you, Sisters, that as soon as a Sister imagines that she’s more important than her Sis-
ter, she's no longer anything in the sight of God; and, as imperfect as her Sister may be, she's better than she is. If anyone thinks she has a better presence, a nicer manner, a sharper mind, that's the spirit of pride slipping into her, the spirit of the devil, and the spirit of hell because pride is the cause of hell.

"Never say, 'This Sister is troublesome and bad-tempered; she has no virtue.' When such a thought crosses your mind, Sisters, look at yourselves and you'll soon say, 'Mon Dieu, she's far better than I am, who can't do anything worthwhile. All I do is spoil things; I don't know how people can stand me.' That's the point we have to reach, Sisters. It's not enough to say this, you must really believe it for, I repeat, it's impossible for a good man to look at himself before God and not see that he's the most wicked man alive. So, Sisters, the Sister Servant must always think that her Sister is better than she is and far more qualified to occupy the position she holds. To do things right, there isn't a single Sister Servant who shouldn't ask permission at least every six months to be relieved of her office. Alas! I know—maybe I shouldn't tell you this—as I said, I know the Superior of a poor little Company, the least and most useless in the Church, who never fails to write at least once a year to ask to be relieved of his office. 'Father,' he says, 'in the name of God, please relieve me. What do you think you're doing with me in this job? I spoil everything and am doing nothing.'

"Now, Sisters, those who are in Paris can ask Mlle Le Gras, the Sister Servant here, or the Superior to relieve them, and those living at a distance have to ask in writing, but do it sincerely and without pretense, and recognize honestly that they're spoiling everything. Furthermore, they should never give orders to their Sisters but always be very gentle in speaking to them, so that it doesn't suggest the sort of person who wants to decide everything herself, like someone who would say, 'Do that, go there, come here.' That's devilish language, Sisters; that's what the demons do. Beware of that. May there never be a Daughter of Charity who speaks that way! God preserve us! When you'd like a Sister to do something, say to her, 'Sister, would you be kind enough to do that?' And add, 'For the love of Our Lord.' In this way she'll have the merit of obe-
dience, and of obedience for the love of Our Lord. So, when you want something, Sisters, please say, ‘Sister, I’m asking you to do this for the love of Our Lord.’ And no one should be able to tell from the way you act which of you is the Sister Servant and which is the companion.

“When you have occasion to speak, it’s up to the Sister Servant to take the initiative. Not that the other Sister may not speak also; but, just as when one is walking with a prominent person, one should remain a step to the rear, in like manner, when the Sister is with her Sister Servant, she may indeed speak at times; but once she has said something, she should let her Sister Servant continue the conversation. And this must be done imperceptibly, so that no one notices it. That’s how you should act with one another, Sisters.

“Let’s say something now about priests. Sisters, how well our Sisters spoke when they said that they should treat them with great respect! With as much respect as though there’s no one in the world to whom such great respect is due! To convince yourselves of this, reflect that they are persons who have the power to cause bread to be changed into the Body of the Son of God; that by their ministry you’re restored to God’s grace; that from an enemy of God they make you His child; that God gives them authority for what they do with regard to sinners; and that they have the power to snatch a soul from the hands of the devil and restore it to God. Sisters, you can never honor them too much. That’s why you should never speak to them except with very great reserve, and hardly dare to raise your eyes in their presence. Respect their holiness—if they are holy—and if, to your knowledge, they are not, respect the holiness of their ministry and the place they hold in the Church of God.

“When you speak to them about the needs of a sick person, do so briefly and succinctly, and never at their residences. Oh no, Sisters, never! it’s better to wait for them at the church. If there’s a pressing need—I mean something really urgent—and you can’t put it off, then you may go there, but never alone. Alas! and what would an unaccompanied Sister be doing in the residence of a priest? What would people say? Oh no! that must absolutely not be done. If the case is urgent, you may take a Sister with you, tell her why you’re
going, and leave immediately afterward. If the priest should want to keep you to discuss something else, don’t do it. You may, however, reply once or twice, but if he wants to detain you any longer after that, say, ‘Please excuse me, Monsieur; I have some business to take care of; I’m rather in a hurry.’ For you see, Sisters, although these are men who, by the holiness of their ministry and the sacred character they bear, are raised far above the rest of people, it could nevertheless happen with some of them that, if you speak to them at length and on unnecessary matters, they might continue to listen, and then both of you would be wasting your time. So you should always deal with them very seriously and briefly.

"With regard to the Ladies you must obey all their orders, keep them fully informed about the patients, take their orders for everything and follow them most exactly, never changing anything of what they tell you to do, and recognize that it’s up to them to give the orders and for you to obey. But I have a very important piece of advice to give you: don’t put yourselves on a par with them, nor treat them as your companions, nor encroach on their authority by giving orders on your own, for you’d spoil everything, Sisters; you’d destroy the Charity; they wouldn’t want to have anything more to do with you, and would pull out of everything. They provide support for the Confraternity from their own resources; you give only your time, which would be of no use without their funding. They are like the head of a body and you’re only the feet. What would it be like if the feet wanted to give orders and to ignore the head whenever they felt like it! That would be quite ridiculous because it’s the distinctive feature of the head to command and up to the feet to move to where the head orders them to go. Now, Sisters, if you want to see the Charity flourish and the poor continue to be assisted, you must act this way with regard to the Ladies; otherwise they’ll grow weary of it. So then, Sisters, try to work with all your might at the practice of the three points we mentioned, which are great love, great cordiality, and great esteem for one another; great respect and perfect reserve toward priests; great dependence, submission, and obedience regarding the Ladies; perfect charity for the poor persons you serve, and total submission to all for the love of God.
"With all my heart I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who willed to come on earth to submit himself not only to His parents but to the most wicked of all men and to His enemies; who did not come to earth to do His own Will but that of His Father; who did not come to command but to obey; I ask Him, I repeat, to put into your hearts the true desire for perfect obedience, the true spirit of obedience that He himself had, and to give you His true Spirit to act with everyone and in all matters in accordance with His holy and divine Will. I make this prayer to the Eternal Father through the Son, to the Son through His holy Mother, and to the entire Blessed Trinity through our poor Sisters now in heaven. Benedictio Dei Patris..."

30. - THE RULES

May 30, 1647

"Sisters, the subject of the present conference is the importance of keeping your Rules well, the benefit and help that come from their observance, and the harm that is caused by growing slack in them. This talk is divided into three parts. I just told you the first one; the second deals with the faults most often committed and into which we most easily allow ourselves to lapse; and the third, the means to remedy the faults that are noted. May it please the Divine Goodness to grant all of us, such as we are, the grace to draw good results from this talk and get some help from it! Sister, would you please tell us your thoughts?"

The Sister then replied that it was very necessary to keep even the most insignificant of her Rules because, if nature begins to grow lax, it will soon demand more. If we neglect one thing today, we'll neglect another tomorrow.

"What Sister means to say is very remarkable," said Most Honored Father; "for it's a ruse of nature that seeks its own ease. For example, if you get up late today, tomorrow your body will feel..."
heavy because it will not have had as much rest. If today you have a fling and go for a walk or pay some visits, tomorrow your mind and body will be unwilling to subject themselves to the confines of the limitations of the Rule. That’s why, Sisters, there’s nothing like getting into the habit of doing what has to be done, if you want to find nothing difficult. Once the body has been disciplined, it no longer finds anything painful and feels fit. Take, for instance, a poor soldier who has served in the army for a long time, badly fed, sleeping on straw—and quite happy if he has any! When he returns home and has had a little more rest in a more comfortable bed, he becomes ill. And that, Sisters, is why Sister is quite right in saying that, if today we do only a little, tomorrow we’ll want to do even less. Go on, Sister.” The Sister added that, to enter into the practice of the Rules, she thought it would be good for her to set out every day to be faithful to them, and in the evening to examine her conscience to see where she had failed.

“That is, Sister, every morning you’d say to yourself, ‘I want to keep my Rules today (don’t talk about tomorrow); with God’s help, I won’t fail in anything.’ In the evening, and even sometimes during the day, at the particular or general examination of conscience, you’d see where you failed in them. I think that’s what you meant to say, Sister, when you spoke about doing penance for them, for that’s necessary. If you did fail, you should punish yourself, either by reciting a decade of the rosary, or kissing the floor, or even taking the discipline. If you follow this advice, you’ll soon notice some progress in the observance of your Rules. When the body sees itself treated like that, it soon submits. God bless you, Sister!

“And would you please tell us what you thought, Sister?”

“I thought that, from the time we enter the Motherhouse, we’re obliged to practice the Rules, since we’ve promised God to live in conformity with them and with the spirit of the Community, and to fail in them would be a lack of fidelity to God.”

“That’s so true! It would be a lack of fidelity to God; right you are, Sister, it would be a lack of fidelity to God! Please continue.”

The Sister added that, to be a true Daughter of Charity, it’s not enough to bear the name and wear the attire, we have to do its
works; otherwise, we’d give bad example to the whole Company, and that would be very harmful to it. On the second point, she said that the most usual faults are the negligence and little love with which we carry out our ministry; the lack of cordiality, forbearance, and deference to the judgment of our Sisters, from which failures in charity among ourselves usually result; and lastly, failures in silence at the appointed times. On the third point, she noted that one good means was to have a high esteem of the Rules and great love for them because they’re the way by which we’ll reach heaven; and to be careful not to do anything that could give bad example to our Sisters.

Another Sister remarked that there was no better means of pleasing God and advancing in virtue than the practice of the Rules, that we often failed in this by talking about the failings of others, and that this fault could be corrected by the practice of the presence of God.

Another Sister gave as reasons for the observance of our Rules that there’s nothing in them that doesn’t tend to the glory of God, that Our Lord willed to fulfill faithfully on earth all that the prophets had said of Him, without omitting a single occasion to do so, and that the Rules prescribed in Communities are lights God has given to Superiors to be proclaimed to those men and women who are willing to embrace them and to be faithful to them. On the second point, one of the principal faults is that we don’t reflect sufficiently on the excellence of our Rules; consequently, we underestimate their value and gradually allow ourselves to neglect them. The remedy is to be energized by the two motives of the first point, which are that we’ll give glory to God and will also please Him.

Another Sister stated as one reason that, having been called to our present situation by the Will of God, we must believe that it’s a sure road to attain the perfection He wants of us. The most generalized fault, and the source of many individual ones, is not to have sufficient esteem for our Rules, to convince ourselves that we can easily be dispensed from them at the slightest obstacle that presents itself. The remedy for this is to have a high esteem for them and to
give ourselves to God anew to begin to observe them more faithfully.

Another Sister said that if we keep our Rules our Rules will keep us, that a fairly common fault is a lack of gentleness and compassion toward the sick, and that a good remedy is to motivate ourselves at the beginning of our actions to do them for the love of God.

Several other Sisters spoke but, since most of them had not written anything down, we couldn’t retain everything. Mademoiselle, requested by Most Honored Father to say what she had thought, handed in her notes which contained the following:

One reason is the recognition of our obligations to God, who knows we need Rules for our salvation and has given us this means of cooperating in this with His grace. Another is that, if the Rules are not observed in Companies, not merely in what they recommend but also in what they forbid, there will be constant disorder and disunion, and God will be more dishonored than glorified.

The most common faults are not making the effort to apply ourselves to meditation; lacking sufficient esteem for our Rules; convincing ourselves that they’re not obligatory; being unwilling to have our faults mentioned to our Superiors; taking the liberty to discuss the faults of others, along with our own troubles and petty discontents; and murmuring often against Superiors.

As means there are the following: to do those things contrary to the aforementioned; to keep ourselves informed frequently of what is according to our Rules; to tell our Superiors, as soon as possible, the faults we have committed against them; to give ourselves daily to God to observe them; to ask His grace to do so and, for that purpose, to pray to the Blessed Virgin and our Guardian Angel.

After expressing his approval of all that had been said for the motives and for the remarks and means, Most Honored Father began his talk in almost the following words: “I thank God, dear Sisters, for the inspirations He has given you on this topic; from the look on your faces it is apparent that, by His mercy, your hearts have been touched by them. I seem to read in them the desire to make serious efforts to practice your Rules faithfully. I see something extraordinary in your behavior. I thank God for this with all my heart.
and beseech His Goodness to lead us to a true knowledge of the glory it will render Him!

"Do you know a powerful motive for embracing your Rules, Sisters? You said it yourselves, namely, that God inspired Superiors to give them to you. You said it was God who had made them. It's not you who said this, Sisters, it's Saint Paul. 'Everything good' says this great saint, 'comes from God'. ¹ Nothing is done for God unless He himself does it. Now, Sisters, what work is more the work of God than yours? Who else would have known how to establish it as He did? What could even God himself have done to make it better?

"First, He has chosen poor young women. If He had chosen rich ones, would they have done what the former have done? Would they have served the sick in the most lowly and painful forms of service? Would they have carried a big pot or a basket to market to purchase provisions? And although, by God’s grace, there are at present among you some women of fairly high rank, it’s easy to believe that they might not have done such things in the beginning.

"After that, could God do anything better than to establish among you the frugality that's practiced here? And isn’t that a sign that it’s God? If you had been well fed and provided with fine foods, alas! Sisters, nature, which seeks her own ease, would scarcely be concerned with going to the assistance of others; you would have begun to idle about and be well fed, and then people wouldn’t have wanted you; for, since you weren’t allowed to spend much money, so as not to be a burden on the places that were asking for you, it was absolutely essential for you to lead this frugal sort of life, which is a very sure sign that your work is the work of God.

"And isn’t this also seen quite clearly in its beginnings and development? Saint Augustine tells us that one sign by which God’s works may be recognized is that they come about by themselves. They go along in such a way that they’re imperceptible, and, in the end, the thing is done, and no one can say how. That’s how it is with your establishment, dear Sisters, for it can’t be said how it came into existence, nor who made it, if not God. Ask Mlle Le Gras if she ever

¹Cf. Jas 1:17 (NAB), and not Saint Paul as Saint Vincent states here.
thought of it. Nothing was further from her mind! As for me, I can tell you before God that I never thought of it. So, who did, Monseur? It was God, who knew full well what He wanted to do, Sisters. Therefore, love the way He has guided your Company and hold fast to the Spirit He has put into it and the practice of the Rules He has introduced, which contain in themselves the most certain means for living as true Christian women. Not only that, but, observed in the Spirit of God, they'll help you to reach the heights of religious piety and the most solid virtue that can be practiced in Christendom.

"First, they're in conformity with the Gospel. They contain all that's most perfect in what Our Lord has taught us, the entire path He has indicated for attaining the kingdom of God. They mark it out for you; I'd make this clear to you in everything, if I weren't pressed for time, but I'll point out to you just two or three articles.

"The first evangelical counsel teaches poverty; Our Lord begins with that when He teaches the way of perfection to those who wish to follow Him. By the mercy of God, Sisters, that's where you begin because, when you enter here, you possess nothing; if you do have anything, you give it up, according to the evangelical precept. At the Motherhouse, you have poverty in all things: you're dressed in the poorest fabrics,—no headdress is as simple as yours—the frugality I just mentioned to you is a sign of God's guidance of your work, evident in what you eat and drink, and, by His grace, everything else is characterized by very great poverty.

"For your consolation, Sisters, I can tell you that nothing is more holy, nor more perfect in the Gospel maxims than what is prescribed for you by the Rules God has given you and which, by God's grace, all of you observe.

"In addition to poverty, Our Lord commands us to leave self; isn't that what you do in coming to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Sisters? For, in all the Orders in the Church of God, who has to renounce self as completely and continually as you do? I, for one, certainly don't know of any. To surrender your own will as soon as you come here, never to entertain a thought of being able to satisfy yourselves in any respect, to live in entire and constant de-
dependence on the will of Superiors to go to a place, to remain, to hold this or that office—that's total self-renunciation.

"In the third place, Our Lord counsels disregard of self and, by His infinite mercy, that's what you're seeking. Is there anything more despicable in the eyes of the world than a poor Daughter of Charity? Don't the holy Rules that the Divine Goodness has been pleased to give you teach you to learn this disregard of self when they dictate that you are to submit your judgment, to have always a high opinion of your Sister, and to believe that you're the cause of what is done poorly?

"What perfection is contained in them, Sisters, and how certain you should feel that they've been given to you from the hand of God, since they're filled with the holiest practices that Jesus Christ taught those who wanted to follow Him, and which the Apostles and all the saints have practiced! One of you said—and it's so true—that it's very difficult to persevere in your vocation when you neglect your Rules. Sisters, it's God who caused you to speak like that, for, not only is it difficult, I'd go further and say it's impossible. For how can a person make herself worthy of the grace of perseverance, if she despises her Rules? And not to observe them is certainly to despise them. You also said that, if you keep them, they'll keep you. From what do you think they'll keep you, Sisters? They'll keep you from being unfaithful to God because no one has ever seen a person, attached to the observance of her Rules, lose her vocation. If she commits other faults, God gives her grace to begin over again.

"That's a powerful motive, Sisters, and a strong reason to incite you to be exact and careful in the practice of your Rules. You yourselves have said so, not I. But I'm coming back to it to emphasize its importance, which is so great that, if well taken, is a question of eternal salvation; for, although you're not obliged to practice your Rules under pain of sin, nevertheless it's true that, since you're in the Company, you're bound to observe them. They're a route God has traced out for you; they're the paths by which He wants to lead you and, if you wander away from them, believe me, dear Sisters, you're in great danger of going astray.
“In the fifth place, the practice of the Rules is both meritorious and satisfactory for those who have embraced them. Every sin deserves punishment, either in this world or in the next. Now, if, in order to make amends for the time she has lost, a person gives herself truly and wholeheartedly to God in a way of life that tends to His glory, all her observances make satisfaction to Him for the punishments due to the sins she has committed. Therefore, she can apply to the forgiveness of her past sins everything her Rules order her to do. Well, Sisters, who among us will neglect such an opportunity? Who hasn’t been sullied by vanity? How many lies, slanders, or bad thoughts, and how many other faults you can’t remember, for which our Rules are sweet penance for us?

“They’re also meritorious in themselves because, while satisfying for past sins, they acquire new merit of such a nature that nothing else is needed to make a person holy, if she has been faithful to them. I saw a Pope, Clement VIII, a very holy man, so holy that even heretics used to say, ‘Pope Clement is a saint.’ He was so touched by God and had the gift of tears in such abundance that, when he went up what is called the Holy Stairs, he bathed it in his tears. Now, this holy man said, ‘Bring me a member of a religious Order, just a girl or a woman who has persevered in obedience to her Rules, give me sufficient proof of this, and I won’t ask for any other evidence of her sanctity; I’ll canonize her. I don’t want any raising of the dead to life; I don’t want any cures or other miracles, but simply the fact that she has kept her Rules. I’ll have her name inscribed in the calendar and a feast proclaimed.’

“This holy person, who was a Pope of our own day, respected the observance of Rules. From this you see, dear Sisters, the merit they have in the sight of God and to what perfection of life they lead the souls who are exact to them, since this holy man asked for no other testimony of sanctity for the canonization of a soul than fidelity to Rule. Isn’t that something to inspire you to love them, to have great respect for them, and never to fail in them? Doesn’t it suffice to reflect that you are doing God’s Will in order to receive satisfaction?

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2 The Scala Santa, near the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome. Clement VIII was Pope (1592-1605).
Is there any more powerful motive? Can a soul who desires to please God want anything else than to do God's Will? And in doing what is prescribed by your Rules, Sisters, you're just as sure of doing God's Will as if He had told you so with His own lips. You couldn't be more certain. Since your Rules come from Him, your Company comes from Him, and He has called you to it to do there what He has ordained for all the others. May God be blessed, Sisters, and let's give ourselves to Him to do always His most holy Will!

"So then, dear Sisters, those are some motives to spur you on to the love, esteem, and fidelity you owe to your Rules. The first is that your work is the work of God; the second, that your Rules contain the means of helping you make your way to Christian perfection; the third, that they're in conformity with the Gospel and composed of what is clearest in it to help the soul advance toward virtue; that it's difficult to persevere in your vocation if your Rules are neglected; that they're meritorious and atoning; and that, were there no other motive than to think you're doing the Will of God, that motive would be powerful enough to oblige us never to deviate from them.

"It now remains to give some means to do so; in nomine Domini. Among all those with which God has inspired you, Sisters, I find one in particular that's wonderfully efficacious, namely, to ask God's grace for that, but to ask it in the right way—I mean with the intention of corresponding with grace to the utmost of our ability and to be faithful in the smallest circumstances because, as you have remarked, whoever is faithful in small things, will be faithful in great ones. Now, don't think that there's anything of slight importance in the Rules, Sisters, because everything pertaining to the glory of God is sacred and noble, and we mustn't neglect to do anything that may be in our power to do. Ask God for this every morning, throughout the day, and at night, and never stop asking for it.

"'But, Monsieur,' someone will object, 'that's very easy to say, but it's very hard to be able to do everything in the way we're told to do it. A thousand circumstances arise preventing us from doing, at specific times, what is being done at the Motherhouse.' Sisters, for
the consolation of those in difficult ministries, let me say that there
must be no delay in what concerns the service of the poor. If, at the
time of your morning prayer, you have to take medicine to some-
one, then go there with your mind at rest; after an act of resignation
to the holy Will of God, offer Him what you’re going to do, unite
your intention with the prayer being made at the Motherhouse or
elsewhere, and go about your business with no anxiety.

‘If, on your return, you’re free to spend a little time in meditation
or spiritual reading, very well! But, if you can’t do it, don’t become
upset, nor think you’ve failed, for it’s not lost when you leave it for a
legitimate reason. And if there is ever a legitimate reason, dear Sis-
ters, it’s the service of the neighbor. To leave God for God is not
leaving God at all, that is, to leave one work of God to do another,
either of greater obligation or of greater merit. You leave prayer or
spiritual reading or you break the Rule of silence in order to help a
poor person. Keep in mind, Sisters, that doing all this is to serve
Him. What a consolation for a good Daughter of Charity to think,
‘I’m going to help my sick poor, but God will accept this in place of
the prayer I should be making just now,’ and let her go off cheer-
fully to wherever God is calling her.

“When Moses read to the people of Israel the Law God had given
him on tablets of stone, he asked them, ‘Will you do all this?’ And
they raised their voices unanimously, saying, ‘We can’t do it of our-
selves, but we will ask it of God.’ The same holds true of your
Rules, Sisters. Of yourselves you can’t observe them exactly but
you must ask this of God.

“My Lord Jesus Christ, it’s true that, of ourselves, we’re poor
creatures capable only of offending Your Divine Majesty and dis-
honoring by our weaknesses the choice that You, in Your goodness,
have made of us to serve You in the way of life to which You have
called us. Yet, trusting in that same divine goodness and mercy,
with our whole heart we ask Your grace for all of us—both those
who are now members of our Company, and those who will be—to
observe the Rules You willed to give us, in the way you carried out
the most holy Will of Your Eternal Father in this world and to die
rather than deliberately commit a single act of infidelity. Should we
be so weak as to allow ourselves to fall, stretch out Your helping hand to us in Your immense charity to raise us up from our falls. All of us, with one accord, ask this of You, my God, and declare that we would rather die than fail in a single iota of what You want of us. May it please your Divine Goodness to grant us sufficient grace to accomplish it with the perfection You want! That, dear Sisters, is the prayer I offer to God for you with all my heart. I entreat Him to respond favorably to your desire for this. If you ask Him often for the grace to carry out your Rules and give yourselves to Him to practice them, He'll never allow you to become unfaithful.

"Another means—and a very effective one, Sisters—is to be willing to be admonished for the faults you commit against your Rules; to consent to your Superiors being informed of them and to their reproving you for them; to accept this in a spirit of meekness; to be glad that they do this act of charity for you; to ask the Sister with whom you live to notify Mademoiselle and to tell me personally, but doing it frankly and sincerely: *Mon Dieu!* Sister, for the love of God please inform M. Vincent and Mademoiselle of the faults you see me commit.*

"You can’t imagine how useful this is, Sisters; for alas! we see only the slightest part of our faults, we even lose sight of sins that incur damnation, as happened to David after he had Uriah put to death. He gave it no thought so God sent him a prophet to admonish him of his sin, and he came to his senses at once. ‘What!’ said he, ‘alas, I have committed that sin!’ ³ And the realization remained so strongly imprinted on his soul that from then on he said daily, ‘Lord, forgive me my sins.’ And when Saint Peter denied Our Lord, he didn’t think he had done wrong. But from the day he was admonished for it, he wept constantly, recognizing the enormity of his sin.

"But do you think there are any persons in your Company and among you, Sisters, who are so disposed to be admonished of their faults and are willing that Superiors be told of them? By the mercy of God, there are some—yes, there are; I’m well aware of this—who’d like all their faults to be known, and I know some who

³Cf. 2 Sm 12:13. (NAB)
are glad to be reminded of their faults and to have them mentioned to Superiors. I'll go even further, Sisters, for I'm willing to believe that you're all disposed to be admonished, not only in private but in public as well.

"Consider the mercies of God on a member of your Company, Sisters—I won't mention her name, at least not just now. From the rural area, where she was staying, she wrote a letter to her Sister who had come to Paris, and this is what she said: 'My very dear Sister, I greet you at the foot of the cross of our dear Savior suffering for us. I'm writing you this note to ask you to do me the great favor of mentioning all my faults to Mademoiselle, without keeping from her a single one of them. This would be the greatest proof of love you could ever show me; for, if you love me, you'll also love my perfection and, in that case, you won't refuse me what will contribute so greatly to it. And to oblige you more strongly to do what I'm asking of you, I'm sending you a little picture of the Blessed Virgin to urge you, by the merits of her Son Jesus Christ, not to refuse me such a just request. For, dear Sister, you know the good someone did you when she did the same for you. So then, please believe me when I say that, with God's help, this will be beneficial to me. Hoping for it from your charity, I remain forever, in the love of our dear Savior, your very humble servant, Sister... ."

"Those, Sisters, are the sentiments of one among you. But I won't mention her name, at least not at present. What do you say to that, Sisters? If she were requesting something that would be very advantageous to her, can she ask for it more insistently than she does when she begs to have her faults mentioned to others? 'And to oblige you to do so,' she says, 'I'm sending you a picture of the Blessed Virgin to urge you to do so by the merits of her Son.' Note that: to give someone a gift to oblige her to mention her faults, and to make a gift of a picture of the Blessed Virgin, which was perhaps very precious to her so that, if the Sister should forget, she might be reminded by the sight of it. God bless her! Believe me, Sisters, when we're faithful to grace, it works wonders in our souls. I've seen persons reach the stage where they wanted everyone to know their faults. I was hearing the confession of a poor woman in the
country; she spoke so loudly that everyone could hear what she was saying. In vain I said to her, ‘My daughter, lower your voice, people can hear you.’ ‘It doesn’t matter, Monsieur,’ she replied, ‘I want everyone to know that I’ve been so wretched as to do all that evil.’ It was to a poor country woman that God gave those sentiments. I also knew a poor man who said to me after his confession, ‘Monsieur, if you would allow me, I’d go through the country proclaiming my sins aloud so that everyone would know me for what I really am.’

‘Those are some of the effects of grace on souls who don’t resist it, Sisters. Believe me, you have to reach that point. Anyone who wants to advance in virtue must be willing to have her faults made known. She should mention them herself and be glad that others reveal them. When you come home, don’t fail to say how you’ve failed against your Rules. If your Sister gets here before you, ask her to tell Mademoiselle where she has seen you fail. If you can’t see Mademoiselle, tell Sister Jeanne, Sister Anne, or Sister X; please mention it, and do so without fail.

‘Those, Sisters, are some means we’ve given you; they are motives that will help you to observe your Rules. But here’s still another, Sisters, which God is sending you. Up to the present, you’ve worked on your own, with no other obligation in relation to God except to carry out the order prescribed for you and in the way of life laid down for you. Up to the present, you haven’t been a body independent of the Ladies of the Confraternity of Charity; but now, Sisters, God wills that you form a special body which, however, without being separated from that of the Ladies, will still have its particular functions and spiritual exercises. Until now you’ve worked with no other obligation; now God wants to bind you more closely by the approval He has permitted the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Archbishop of Paris to give to your Rules and your way of life. This is the petition presented to him; here are the Rules, then here’s the approval. I’ll read them for you one after the other.”

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4 The Rules submitted to Jean-François de Gondi in 1645.
His Charity was kind enough to do just that, although there were many pages to read. The first article of the Rule states that the Company is composed of widows and unmarried women, who will elect, by a plurality of votes, one among them to be Superioress for a period of three years; she may continue in that office for a further three years, but not beyond. M. Vincent said this was understood to be after God had called to himself Mademoiselle, who thereupon knelt down and begged him to begin it right now. “Your Sisters and I, Mademoiselle, have to ask God to give you many more years of life,” he replied. “It’s God’s usual method of acting to preserve by extraordinary means those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His works; and if you think about it, Mademoiselle, you really haven’t been alive for more than ten years now—at least in the ordinary way.”

He then continued to read until he reached the article that states, “It will be a Confraternity and will bear the name of *Confraternity of Sisters of the Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor.*” Having said this, he exclaimed softly, “What a lovely title, Sisters! *Mon Dieu!* What a lovely title and what a beautiful designation! What have you done for God to deserve it? *Servants of the Poor* is the same as saying *Servants of Jesus Christ,* since He regards what is done to them as done to Himself, for they are His members. And what did He do in this world but serve persons who were poor? Preserve this title carefully, dear Sisters, for it’s the most beautiful and the most worthwhile one you could have. Do you know—I don’t know if I’ve mentioned this to you before—do you know what title the Pope takes? The most beautiful and most venerable of his titles, the one he uses when dealing with the most important affairs, is *Servant of the Servants of God.* We read, ‘Such and Such—Clement, Urban, or Innocent—at this time Servant of the Servants of God.’ You also, Sisters, may sign your name *Servants of the Poor,* who are the well-beloved of Jesus Christ! When Saint Francis gave his Rule, he took the title of *Minor* which means *little.* If this great patriarch called himself ‘little,’ shouldn’t you consider it a great honor to follow him and to call yourselves *Servants of the Poor*?”
Most Honored Father continued to read until he came to the article stating that Sisters maintained at the Motherhouse will be provided for from the meager income of the said house and from the work and savings of the Sisters. "Sisters," he then added, "how beautiful that is: from your savings, that is, what you place in reserve by your frugal mode of living; and from the work of your hands—manual labor, you see; that means what you do outside the time during which you’re on duty with the sick. In your free time you earn something to contribute to the formation of others, who will afterward carry on the same good work as you are doing. May God bless you, Sisters, and give you grace in abundance!"

M. Vincent continued to read the Rules and paused at the article stating that the Sisters will guard against offending God grievously, especially in what concerns chastity, taking every precaution to preserve it, not allowing men to enter their rooms, and not stopping in the streets to speak with persons of the opposite sex. If they must do so, they will cut short the conversation. "Sisters," he said, "that refers to men, to whom you will never stop to talk in the streets, except in extreme necessity. Cut short the conversation. Say what you have to say, as clearly and briefly as possible, and then send them away."

M. Vincent then went on to read the remaining Rules; when he came to the article on silence, he added, "I urge you to observe this, Sisters. Honor at that time the hidden life of the Son of God. ‘But that’s very difficult, Monsieur,’ someone will say, ‘we have business at that time.’ In that case, Sisters, remember what I said to you a little while ago about prayer, that to nurse the sick is to make your prayer. The same holds true of silence; but at least you must observe it faithfully from after reading in the evening and from rising in the morning until the end of prayers. And if you’re very careful of this, nothing can keep you from it. All that’s needed is a little care and reflection, but above all a desire to keep the Rule."

After he had finished reading the Rules, Most Honored Father added, "Our wish has been that what was said of Our Lord might be said of you, Sisters, namely, that He began to do, then to teach. Isn’t this what you’ve just heard, Sisters, and what you’re doing

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5Cf. Acts 1:1. (NAB)
already? Is there anything you haven’t done? No, by the mercy of God; what you’ve been instructed to do today, you were doing previously. It’s true that I had already received orders about this from the late Pope, but you hadn’t yet received any specific order. Thousands of years before Our Lord came into the world God had sent Moses, to whom He had given a Law, a figure of the one Our Lord was to bring. The people always observed it. But when Our Lord gave His Law, everyone embraced it. Not that Our Lord abolished the Old Law, because the Commandments contained in it are also in the New, but He perfected it.

“So now, Sisters, here are Rules, approved by the mercy of God, which establish you as a Confraternity of Charity separate from the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity, with whom you’ve been associated up to the present. They don’t disengage you from that of the Ladies, to whom you’re still subject in all that concerns the service of the sick, but they do make you different in your manner of life, so that, as far as you are concerned, the Confraternity you shared with the Ladies is now only like what the Law of Moses was in regard to that of Jesus Christ. You should consider these Rules as coming to you from the hand of God himself, since they’re given by order of the Archbishop, on whom you depend. How consoled should you not feel, Sisters, to see such an effect of the guidance and Spirit of God on you! Thank Him because you’ve already kept them; thank Him because now you’re even more obliged to observe them and because it has pleased His Divine Goodness to order you to do so and, by that very fact, to give you a testimony and assurance that they’re acceptable to God. May your next Holy Communion be in thanksgiving for this, dear Sisters. Thank Him, all of you, in your Sunday Holy Communion, and I’d like you to do this as well on Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. Let all three Communions be for this intention, and also to thank God for your vocation and to ask Him for new graces for His glory and the accomplishment of His work.

“When Moses gave the Law of God to the people of Israel, after seeing how ardently they desired it he said to them, ‘My people, this Law is given to you on the part of God. If you keep it, I promise you, on behalf of the same God, a thousand blessings on all your works, a
blessing when you’re in your homes, a blessing when you leave them, a blessing on your work and on your rest, a blessing on all that you do and don’t do; in short, all blessings will abound in and on you. If, instead of keeping it, you disdain it, I promise you the exact opposite of all that I’ve just said; for a curse will be on you in your houses, a curse on you outside them, a curse when you enter and a curse when you leave them, a curse on what you do and a curse on what you don’t do; in short, all curses shall settle in and on you.”

“What Moses said to the people of God, I say to you, Sisters. You have the Rules that have been sent to you on the part of God. If you observe them faithfully, all the blessings of heaven will be poured out on you: you’ll have a blessing on your work and on your rest, a blessing on entering and on going out, a blessing on what you do and on what you don’t do; all things will be filled with blessings for you. If—God forbid—anyone did not intend to enter into this plan, I say to her what Moses said to those who wouldn’t fulfill the Law he gave them on the part of God, ‘A curse will be on you in the house and outside the house, on what you do and on what you don’t do, etc.’

“I’ve already told you on other occasions, Sisters, that a person who boards a ship for a long voyage must submit to everything that is done on board; if he didn’t obey all the laws that are kept on it, he’d be in danger of shipwreck. In the same way, those called by God to live in a holy Community must observe all its Rules. By the mercy of God, Sisters, I think each of you is determined to put them into practice. Don’t you all feel this way?” They all said yes with one voice. And Most Honored Father went on, “When Moses gave the Law to the people of God they were all kneeling, as I see you doing now, and I hope that His Mercy will second your desires by enabling you to do what He is asking of you. Do you not give yourselves wholeheartedly to God, Sisters, to live in the observance of your holy Rules?” Everyone answered yes. “Aren’t all of you resolved with all your heart to live and die in them?” he continued. Everyone answered yes. “I implore the sovereign goodness of

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*Cf. Dt 28. (NAB)*
God," he said, "that it may please Him, by His infinite mercy, to pour forth abundantly on you all sorts of graces and blessings so that you may be able to accomplish perfectly and in all things the good pleasure of His most holy Will in the practice of your Rules." At this point, one or several Sisters asked pardon for the faults they had committed.

"I ask God with all my heart, Sisters, to forgive you your failings. And I, wretched man that I am, don’t keep my own Rules, and I ask you to forgive me for this! I'm very guilty in your regard in what concerns your work. Please ask God to have mercy on me. For my part, I'll ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to give you himself His holy blessing, and I won’t say the words of it today because the faults I've committed in your regard make me unworthy of it. I ask Our Lord to be the one to do it." Having said that, he kissed the floor. Seeing this, Mademoiselle and all the Sisters, deeply distressed that he was unwilling to give his blessing, begged him several times to do so with such insistence and importunity that, in the end, he yielded.

"Pray then that God will not consider my unworthiness nor the sins of which I'm guilty but that, having mercy on me, He will pour forth His blessings on you while I pronounce the words of blessing. Benedictio Dei Patris..."

31. - HOLY COMMUNION
August 18, 1647

"Sisters, the subject of this conference is Holy Communion. The first point deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity, like all other Christians, should give themselves to God to receive Communion worthily; that is, Sisters, it deals with the importance of making a worthy Communion because of the benefits that come from it or the evils that ensue. The second point deals with what you think
should be done for that purpose; that is, the means each one has rec­

ognized as necessary and proper for making a good Communion.

We have only one hour, Sisters, and we must try, with the help of

God, to make good use of it.

"For what reasons, Sister, should Daughters of Charity give

themselves to God to make a good Communion? What benefit re­

sults from a good Communion and what evil from a bad one?" The

Sister replied that, in her opinion, a person who had made a good

Communion did everything well. "What good thinking, what good

thinking! The person who has made a good Communion does ev­

everything well! And this is true, for how could a person who has been

so happy as to make a good Communion do something wrong? She

carries God in her heart; she carries a sweet fragrance everywhere;

she does nothing except in view of God and for His love. So, Sisters,

rest assured that a Daughter of Charity who has made a good Com­

munion will do everything else well. Her heart is the tabernacle of

God—yes, the tabernacle of God. The Daughter of Charity should

always be that; she should always be in God and God in her, and in

that way she’ll never do anything but good.

"And what harm, Sister, comes to a person who makes a bad

Communion?" The Sister replied that such a person would lose the

merit of all her other Communions and might even lose her voca­

tion. "Stop there for a minute, Sister. Our Sister has mentioned two

or three great evils, which should be weighed and considered atten­

tively. The person who makes a bad Communion, she says, will lose

the fruit and merit of all her past Communions; she’ll lose the merit

of all those she will subsequently make, if she doesn’t do penance;

she’ll lose all the good she’s ever done and could do. All that will

count for nothing for her and, worst of all, she’ll lose her vocation.

"Isn’t that what happened to Judas? Like all the other Apostles,

Judas had received Our Lord’s grace; he had been called to be an

Apostle; he had preached, worked miracles, had the honor of fol­

lowing the Son of God, and had assisted at the institution of the

most august Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. He

made a bad Communion, and what followed? He lost his vocation at

once, withdrew from the holy company of the Apostles to which he
belonged, went and sold his Master and, in the end, damned himself forever.

"So, our Sister was quite right when she said that a Sister could lose her vocation. And she will do so without fail, for how can she be faithful to her vocation, if she isn't faithful to God? That's not to be expected. The person who does nothing to make herself worthy of the graces and fruits of Holy Communion won't become exact in the practice of her Rules; she'll fall into negligence, then into weariness, and finally into a total loss of the graces she received from God. Watch out for this, Sisters, for we mustn't rely on the first fervor we show; we forget all that; and if the Sister has no concern for the promises she made to creatures, she won't pay the slightest attention to the ones she made to God.

"Now, Sister, what benefit is there for a Daughter of Charity who makes a good Communion?" The Sister replied that, when someone had made a good Communion, she did everything well; she was more gentle and charitable towards the sick, and gave greater edification to everyone. "What an excellent comment: the person who has made a good Communion does everything well! If Elijah, 1 endowed with a twofold spirit, worked such wonders, what will a person do who has God within her, who is filled with God? She won't be acting of herself; she'll be doing the actions of Jesus Christ; she'll look after the sick with the charity of Jesus Christ; she'll have the gentleness of Jesus Christ in her conversation; she'll have the patience of Jesus Christ in her trials; and she'll have the obedience of Jesus Christ. In a word, Sisters, all her actions will no longer be those of a mere creature, they'll be the actions of Jesus Christ.

"In this way, Sisters, the Daughter of Charity who has made a good Communion does nothing displeasing to God because she does the actions of God himself. The Eternal Father respects His Son in such a person; He considers all the actions of such a person as the actions of His Son. What a grace, Sisters! To be certain of being respected by God, held in consideration by God, loved by God! So, when you see a Sister from the Charity nursing the sick gently, lo-

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1This should be Elisha (cf. 2 Kgs 2:9. [NAB]). Here, as in several other places, Vincent has given an incorrect Scripture reference.
ingly, and attentively, you may say confidently, 'That Sister has made a good Communion.' When you see a Sister who is patient in the midst of difficulties, cheerfully enduring all that may be hard to bear, rest assured that this Sister has made a good Communion and that those virtues aren’t ordinary virtues but the virtues of Jesus Christ. Endeavor to imitate the most sacred and august person of Jesus Christ, Sisters, both for His own sake and because He’ll make you pleasing to God His Father.

"Since we have very little time left, Sisters, I think that what has already been said about the importance of giving oneself to God in order to make a good Communion will suffice to enlighten you on the advantage and disadvantage of making a good or a bad Communion because, if, as has been said—and it’s quite true—a person who has received Communion worthily does everything well, then one who has communicated unworthily does everything badly. What does a person receive who has made a good Holy Communion? She receives Jesus Christ and, with Him, a thousand efficacious graces and blessings to work out her salvation and contribute with Jesus Christ to that of others; and, in the end, she receives eternal life.

"And what does the one who makes an unworthy Communion receive? Alas! Sisters, she receives her own condemnation. It’s Saint Paul who says so, and it’s true, for the world would sooner perish than would the truth of the words spoken by the servants of God, who were instruments of the Holy Spirit. Now this is Sacred Scripture and must not be doubted. ‘He who receives the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ worthily, in the holy Sacrament of the altar, shall have life eternal,’ says this great Apostle,² and the person who receives it unworthily receives his condemnation and will be eternally lost, if he does not do penance.

"Since, then, whoever receives Communion worthily performs actions that aren’t ordinary actions but actions of Jesus Christ, the person who makes a bad Communion doubtless performs actions, not of a human person but of the demon, and worse even than those

²Cf. 1 Cor 11:23-30. (NAB)
of the demon, if that were possible. Could the devil conceive anything more sacrilegious and abominable than what Judas did after receiving Communion unworthily? To rebel against God after receiving such extraordinary graces! It seems that only the devil is capable of that. And Judas did this after receiving Communion! Abomination of abominations! To desert the side of God, to rebel against Him, to sell and betray Him! Those who abandon their vocation have a great deal to fear and should really consider whether their conduct may not be a punishment for their Communions that were badly made, with no amendment or improvement! I'm not speaking of anyone in particular, but am simply cautioning you that care should be taken not to abuse God's goodness toward us in this holy and most august sacrament. He doesn't chastise us the first time we sin against Him, but let's fear that, if we don't correct these sins, we may end by making a bad Communion, and such an unworthy Communion may draw down on us the chastisement of all our other sins because Judas—I'm going back to that example—had committed other crimes against the Son of God. He had conceived envy in his heart against Him, which had no effect; and as soon as he had received Communion, the devil took possession of his heart and involved him in his abominable undertakings.

"But, Monsieur," you will say, 'what is an unworthy Communion?' May God preserve us from it, dear Sisters! I hope from His Goodness that not one of you is in the state of mortal sin. But there are so many things to be considered if we're to make our Communions profitably and to good account that it's well—even though, by the mercy of God, none of us has a conscience in that state—to see what can hinder our progress and whether it isn't some lack of the proper dispositions for Communion, and also to see what we need to do to receive Communion worthily.

"Sister, what do you think is necessary to make a good Communion?" The Sister replied that she thought it was necessary to ask God fervently for the grace to do so. "That's good, Sister, and that's where we should begin. For who can hope to do a good deed if God doesn't give her the grace to do it? And who of herself can conceive a good thought? According to Saint Paul no living person can do so
of himself, Sisters. Who then could prepare herself to make a good Communion if God doesn’t give her the grace? Sister was quite right to suggest this means. It’s the basis and foundation of all the others; and God will never refuse it to anyone who asks for it properly. God bless you, Sister!

“And you, Sister, what other means do you think are necessary to make a good Communion?” The Sister replied that she thought we should have an ardent desire for it.

“How right you are, Sister. Consider what she is saying, Sisters; we should have an ardent desire for it—ardent, for God doesn’t wish to be desired coldly or lukewarmly, but with all the strength and ardor of our will, in the same way as He desires to communicate himself to us. When He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, He said to His Apostles, Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum, which means ‘I have ardently desired to eat this pasch with you.’ Now, since the Son of God, who gives himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, desired this with such an ardent desire—desiderio desideravi—isn’t it right that the soul who desires to receive Him, and of whom He is the sovereign good, should desire Him with all her heart? Rest assured, Sisters, that what He said to His Apostles He still says to each one of you. That’s why you must try to stir up your desire by some good thought such as ‘You desire to come to me, my Lord, and who am I? But I, my God, desire with all my heart to go to you, for you are my sovereign good and my last end.’ The late Bishop of Geneva used to say that He always celebrated Mass as if it were for the last time, and received Communion as if it were Viaticum. That’s an excellent practice and I advise you, as strongly as possible, dear Sisters, to adopt it.

“Your Communion days are regulated clearly enough; you can find out when they are and, beginning on the previous evening, prepare your heart. ‘My God, I’ll receive you tomorrow. Alas! how I wish that my preparation were the same as that of the Most Holy Virgin and of all the saints! I sincerely desire, my God, to have all the love of the Seraphim so that I might give it to you. What shall I

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Cf. Lk 22:15. (NAB)}\]
do, my God? What shall my understanding say? What shall my memory do? What shall my will give You? O Lord my God, may You yourself put within me all You wish to be there. May this Communion make up for the imperfections of all the others from which, unfortunately, I have not benefited, and may I be what I would want to be, my God, if this were the last one of my life and I were to die immediately after it! You might then make an act of contrition for all the sins of your past life, Sisters, a renewed detestation of sin and a resolution to avoid it in future. In this way, God will bless your disposition and won’t fail to communicate himself to you and to give you His Spirit to do what He wills of you for life or for death.

“And you, Sister, what do you think should be done to make a good Communion?”

“To benefit from Holy Communion I think we really have to take care to thank God, Monsieur.”

“You’re right, Sister. What we’ve said up to this point has dealt with the preparation, but after Holy Communion it’s absolutely necessary to thank God. If a bride gave a cold reception to her husband on their wedding day, to which he had been looking forward for so long and on which He expected to receive greater expressions of affection, how hurt and very sad he would feel! What good reason he would have to complain of the bad treatment of his bride! And if he were of a social status to have done her a great honor by marrying her, how indignant and offended would he not feel? If a friend who had been separated from his friend for a long time ardently desired to see him again, cherished the hope of doing so in his heart, and rejoiced at the thought of this consolation; if, I say, on the day they were reunited, instead of the friend he was promising himself, he found an enemy, ready to plunge a dagger into his heart and take his life, what would become of him? Instead of a bride, that bridegroom would find a shameless woman; and the friend, instead of a friend, would find an enemy. Now, Sisters, this is what Jesus Christ is for souls who have given themselves to Him. He’s more a spouse than all the spouses on earth, and in a very different way, for this way is truly heavenly and truly divine. He is more a friend than all the friends in the world since He has given His blood and His life
for the salvation of each soul. What will He say then if, having desired with a great desire—_desiderio desideravi_—to unite himself to you, to share with you His graces, merits, and glory; what will He say if you, remaining silent and ungrateful, spurn Him and turn your back on Him? Will He not have good reason to be justly angered and to withdraw all the graces He had bestowed so abundantly on you? This is how vocations are lost, Sisters, and is the reason why the unfortunate Judas was abandoned to the demon, who enticed him. He would have received the remedy against temptation, had he wanted to make use of it; but he spurned it, and you see what happened to him.

“I recall that six or seven years ago the late King Louis XIII was angry for a week or so because, on his return from a journey, when he had taken the trouble of sending for the Dauphin so he could visit with him, the latter wouldn’t look at him (he was only a child) and turned his back on him. The King was angry and rebuked those in charge of the Dauphin. ‘Had you prepared my son,’ he said, ‘had you explained to him how important it is for him to see me, he would have come into my presence, as he was obliged to do, and manifested joy at my return.’ Now, Sisters, if an earthly King is rightly angered because, on his arrival, his son turns his back on him, what will Jesus Christ do, the King of Heaven and earth, compared with whom all the Kings of the earth are as nothing? What will He do, I repeat, should He meet any of you who, not having prepared for His coming by the consideration that He is God and the benefits He brings to the soul, instead of devoting herself entirely to thanking Him, giving Him her heart, offering Him her soul, and abandoning everything for His sake, remains cold and useless? What good reason His Divine Goodness would have to be offended! Please, Sisters, let’s be very careful of this for the love we owe to God, the benefit it will bring our souls, and the glory we will give to God, if we don’t make ourselves unworthy of the graces He wants to grant us.

“And you, Sister, what is necessary to receive Communion well?”
“I think that, if we receive Communion worthily once, Monsieur, that Communion will serve as a preparation for other good Communions and will draw down on us God’s grace so as not to make bad ones.”

“That’s really good, Sister. You’re saying that, if we prepare well one time, we’ll receive Communion with the intention of being faithful to God and will strive daily to do so because, dear Sisters, that should be our aim, and when, in order to make a good Communion we are careful to thank God, that Communion will be a preparation for the next one, and that one for another; in this way, we’ll always draw down on ourselves fresh graces of God and rise to a higher degree of love and perfection.

“And what about you, Sister, do you have any other good means?”

“Monsieur, I think that one of the things necessary to dispose us to make a good Communion is to lead a quiet life, like the Blessed Virgin did, not making useless visits or talking too much.”

“So, Sister, you think that, in order to make a good Communion, you should speak little and not pay visits in the city?”

“That’s my thought, Monsieur.”

“God bless you, Sister, you’re so right! Is there anything that causes greater dissipation of heart than too much talking, and anything that causes greater harm to recollection and spiritual advancement than useless visits? Sisters, if any of you, under any specious and pious pretext whatsoever—for you wouldn’t otherwise do so—has allowed herself to pay visits from which she sees no benefit before God, she should discontinue them. The Most Blessed Virgin would leave the house to provide for the needs of the family and the solace and consolation of her neighbor, but it was always in the presence of God; apart from that, she remained quietly at home, conversing in spirit with God and the angels. Ask her, Sisters, to obtain for you from God this interior recollection by which you’ll prepare yourselves for the most holy Communion of the Body and Blood of her Divine Son and will be able to say, ‘My heart is ready; my God, my heart is ready!’ ⁴

⁴Cf. Ps 56:8. (D-RB)
“And you, Sister, what do you think is necessary? Give us some good means for making a worthy Communion.” The Sister answered that she thought it necessary for us not only to have no attachment to mortal sin but also to rid ourselves of anything depraved we might have, either in our habits, our will, etc.

“You see, Sisters, in order to go to Communion frequently it’s not enough to have no attachment to mortal sin; you must also rid yourselves of every immoderate attachment, for every immoderate attachment is deceitful. Now, to love a certain Sister ardently and to be attached to her is an immoderate attachment; to love to be in one place rather than in another, or in this ministry rather than in that, is an immoderate attachment, and we must rid ourselves of them in order to make ourselves worthy of frequent Communion.

“And you, Sister, do you have any other means? Tell us briefly what you do when you want to prepare for Holy Communion.” The Sister replied that she would offer herself entirely to God, saying with Saint Teresa, “My God, give Yourself entirely to me; I give myself entirely to You,” and that to benefit from Holy Communion we had to mortify our senses, especially curiosity in regard to seeing and hearing useless things, which occupy our minds and prevent us from being united with God.

“Mademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts on those two points?”

Mademoiselle then read some notes on her meditation, which she had written in the following terms: “On the first point, I thought of two main reasons in which all the others are included: one is fear and the other is love. The precept of the Church that we must receive Communion once a year under pain of mortal sin shows that it’s God’s absolute Will for us to go to Communion. This threat is probably advising us to receive Communion more often, under pain of losing many graces that would be given to us in Holy Communion. It’s also important that we give ourselves to God to receive Communion worthily because, if we don’t, we’ll run the risk that the threats addressed both to those who don’t go to Communion at all and to those who go unworthily, may be addressed to us to punish us.
"The other reason we have for giving ourselves to God to make a good Communion is the gratitude we should have for the great love He shows in giving himself to us in Holy Communion; we can do so only by expressing a reciprocal love of Our Lord, so to speak, and by desiring with all our heart to receive Him, since He wishes with all His heart to give himself to us. His love seemed even greater to me from the fact that, since His Incarnation sufficed for our Redemption, it seems that He's giving himself to us in the Sacred Host solely for our sanctification, not only by the application of the merits of His Incarnation and death, but also by the desire of His Goodness to make us share in all the actions of His life and to establish us in the practice of His virtues, wishing to make us like himself by His love.

"On the second point—what we should do in order to give ourselves to God to make a good Communion—I thought we should have such great esteem for Holy Communion that it causes us to fear not having the dispositions for a worthy Communion, and that, since one of the effects of Communion—the principal one—is union with God, we must do our utmost to strive to remove the hindrances to this union. And seeing that the most dangerous of all is to be too self-centered, through love of our own will, if we're to participate in the fruits of Holy Communion, it's essential for us to give ourselves to God to have only one will with Him; this is what I desired after having been shown by God on so many occasions that I'm incapable of any manner of good and utterly unworthy of Holy Communion.

"What I felt I should do is to regard more attentively the actions of the Son of God so as to try to unite mine with His, assisted by His grace. And because I know that God sees everything, I think we must always have a right intention in going to Communion, with no admixture of human respect, but by the love we should bear the holy and divine humanity of Jesus Christ, so that we may correspond faithfully with the love He has for us in this Most Holy Sacrament. The knowledge God has given me of the abuse of Holy Communion I have often made during my life, leading a life that made me unworthy of it because of the violence of my passions, has inspired me
with the desire to strive to mortify them, so as not to incur God's hatred instead of His love, should I continue to make a bad use of this divine food."

"These, dear Sisters, are ample means to dispose you to make a good Communion and to profit from your Communions. And when you receive Communion in this way and with the dispositions you yourselves have mentioned—for it's to you that God in His goodness has communicated all those truths, and I did nothing but recall them—when, I repeat, you receive Communion in this way, you can be sure that you've made a good Communion. You've said that you must ask God for this grace. Nothing is easier than that, and you obtain it if you ask for it properly, that is, wholeheartedly and with the desire to make use of it.

"The means aren't lacking: mortifying your passions and senses, speaking little, not making useless visits, preparing yourselves from one Communion and another, and during that time, Sisters, always advancing in some degree of virtue and love of God, plus all the other efficacious means you mentioned, but on which I haven't had time to make any remarks. There is one you never mentioned, Sisters, and that is to go to confession; yes. Sisters, you must go to confession. It's the proximate preparation and the one that makes amends for the faults that may be present in all the others. It makes up for their imperfection and confers the grace that makes our souls so pleasing to God. So, we should go as often as possible because we can't be too pure when approaching God; above all, however, we should go with a firm purpose of amendment.

"Yet another means to obtain forgiveness for all the sins we—you, Sisters, and I, a wretched sinner—may have committed in our Communions is to ask God's mercy for the past and His grace for the future. Make this request with your whole heart, each one of you personally; and I, as the most guilty, will do so aloud, both for you and for myself, with a heart filled with the confidence that God will not regard my sins but your desire.

"My God, with all my heart I ask for your mercy. Mercy, my God, mercy for all the abuses we've made of Your grace! For our negligence in correcting the faults that have displeased You, mercy,
my God! For all the times we’ve treated Your sacred mysteries unworthily, mercy, my God! Don’t remember our sins. May those sorry days be blotted out, and may Your mercy forget them forever! I ask You this, my Lord, both for this Company and for myself, begging you at the same time, my God, to grant us the grace never again to approach Your holy altar without the preparation You desire, so that we may be able to put into practice the means You have shown us to be necessary for that, and may we always be faithful to Your grace and to Your holy love.

"Do not consider the voice of the sinner who is speaking to You, my God, but deign to look at the hearts of those who ask You for this mercy and grace; and I, though the most unworthy of all men, relying on Your promises, my God, will not fail to speak the words of blessing which confer Your Spirit and Your grace. As I pronounce them, may the Divine Goodness be pleased to pour them into the souls of those who receive them on your behalf! Benedictio Dei Patris..."
Him, was totally forgotten by people. In the same way it is to be feared that a Daughter of Charity who is unfaithful to her vocation may be forgotten by God and by others. The second point is on what we should do when we feel troubled about our vocation. I thought we should sometimes go over in our minds the motives that had led us to give ourselves to God in this vocation, and to recall the fervor with which we carried out what was prescribed when we began. Another means is often to look upon our Lord in His sufferings, which were great and which lasted all His life until His death."

"So those are two reasons our Sister has given on this first point. The first is to consider who is the author of the way of life we've embraced—and who is none other than God himself. That's true, Sisters, and it's a very good reason because, when a Daughter of Charity who is tempted to abandon her vocation begins to consider that God is its author, will she not see that it's the devil who, by his wiles, is trying to lure her away from it?

"The second reason she proposes for holding fast is the fear that the same thing may happen to us as to the young man who sought Our Lord in order to ask Him what he should do to gain the kingdom of heaven. When Our Lord told him to sell what he had and follow Him, the Gospel tells us that he went away quite sad, and from that time on no mention is made of him, and nothing whatever is said of what happened to him. Now, Sister means to say that the same holds true of a person who abandons her vocation and leaves the place where God had sent her; she's forgotten by God and by others. That Sister, who could have done so much good, who had a talent for serving the poor and would have greatly benefited from it, and who could have given glory to God by so many good works that would have made her so happy if she had allowed herself to be guided, withdraws; no one speaks of her any more; no one asks what she's doing or not doing, but they leave her to herself, just as she is.

"On the second point, Sister made another two remarks, the first being that we should reflect on the motives that led us to choose our vocation. What a great means that is, Sisters, for renewing your fervor! For, as a rule, when we are tempted, we forget everything else, and nothing seems reasonable to us except what inclines us toward
the temptation. 'But I don't know if it's God who has called me to this state of life.' Well, what could have made you abandon what you were, if not God? Is it flesh? Is it blood? Alas! by the mercy of God, flesh and blood don't get much satisfaction in the Company. 'But,' someone may say, 'can one be tempted to abandon her vocation when it comes from God?' My reply, Sisters, is that she can. But if the temptation were to last a day, a week, or a month, or should it last six months, or even years, that would be no reason, Sisters, to make you think your vocation might not be from God.

"'But were the saints tempted?' Indeed they were, Sisters, and very strongly tempted! 'Quoi? as long as I've been?' Some were tempted all their lives. And God allowed this to manifest His power and glory by showing that, although the devil may strive to lead His servants astray, nevertheless, they do not fail in the fidelity they owe Him.

"'Now, temptations arise in two ways. Sometimes they come from God, who proposes His servants to the devil to put him to shame, as He did with Job. 'Look at my servant Job,' said He, 'how faithful he is to my law.' At once the devil asks permission to tempt him, and God allows him to do so to show how His servant remains as staunch under trial as he had been in tranquillity, and even to give him the opportunity to merit the crown by winning the victory.

"The devil also tempts the servants of God because he's envious of the good they accomplish, both for themselves and for their neighbor; he wants them to fall to prevent them from continuing. Take, for instance, a Daughter of Charity who sets out to bring a pot of soup to a sick person. That's not such a great thing; it's just a little soup. But when she takes it, she'll say a few good words to the patient and God will touch his heart. Oh! that causes the devil to burst with rage. She snatches from him this soul whom he thought was his own; in revenge, he'll do everything in his power to ruin the Sister herself, and will begin little by little. First, he'll make her spiritual exercises difficult for her; then he'll cause her petty vexations that will put her in a bad mood; next, he'll influence her to go about her work listlessly for form's sake. Afterward she'll grow slack in the practices of her Rule, then begin to find them distasteful and, in the
end, will abandon everything. And how does she reach that stage? By not remaining firm in her conviction that the Institute comes from God, and that He called her to it to work out her salvation. And for not having a high enough respect for what she was, she has fallen miserably. Well! let's not make any judgment; only God knows that.

"But what will happen next, Sisters? Because she has made herself worthless of God's choice of her, this poor Sister will be divested of the grace He gave her, a grace sufficient for her sanctification. When we priests are so wretched as to commit a crime that merits death, we are condemned by the judges and sent to the Bishop to be defrocked. When the criminal has come before the Bishop, he is clothed once again in his priestly vestments; then the Bishop recites an imprecation in Latin, stating that, for having unfortunately abused his vocation, he has rendered himself unworthy to wear the chasuble; and the chasuble is taken off first. The Bishop then continues and says that, for having abused his vocation, he has made himself unworthy of the holy stole; and the stole is taken away. Then it's the maniple, the cincture, the alb, and all the other priestly vestments.

"Now, Sisters, the same holds true of God with regard to a Daughter of Charity who loses her vocation. In His mercy, God called her; He let her see the good she was embracing; He gave her the grace to carry out what she was supposed to do. And this Sister will neglect her Rules, will make no account of obedience, will love her own will, and will disdain the warnings given her by her Superiors. God bears with her for a time, shows her the state in which she is, allows her faults to become known and that she be admonished to correct them. And since she spurns all that, God says, 'I called you from your home to enjoy the rewards promised to those who serve Me, and you have made yourself unworthy of them; therefore I shall give to someone else the crown I had prepared for you'; and He'll call a young woman from Touraine, or Saintonge, or Brittany to come here to receive the crown that, in His mercy, he had intended for Marie, Françoise, Jeanne, or someone else whom He had called and who made herself unworthy of it. That, dear Sisters, is what
God does when, by our cowardice, we have been the occasion for His just wrath to be vented on us.

"Will you please tell us your thoughts, Sister?"

"I thought that one reason for being steadfast in our vocation is that God is glorified in it by the exercises of piety we carry out daily in serving poor persons. The second reason is that it's useless to begin well if we don't persevere so as to increase God's glory."

"So then, there are two reasons our Sister notes on the first point, namely, that God is glorified in us by the virtues we practice, and that it's not enough to begin well if we don't persevere so as to increase God's glory. How good God is, Sisters, to be willing to be glorified by the actions of a poor country woman! Jeanne, Marie, and Françoise will gladly put up with what is said to them as they go about serving the poor. That's practicing patience. This sick person will be discontented, and they'll still try to draw him out of his bad mood, speak to him about God, teach him to make an act of faith, and that's practicing charity.

If the patient tells them he's not well cared for, they'll blame themselves, and that's practicing humility. In this way they'll find occasions to practice a thousand virtues, by which God will be glorified. When you see Sisters who don't seek their own interests nor their own ease, and who are always even-tempered, isn't it obvious that there's a God for whom they're working? And when people see them growing in virtue and working until death, they'll be showing that they really love God and that nothing can separate them from Him.

"Well, Sister, what should a Sister do who feels troubled, tempted, and driven to abandon everything?"

"I think she should mention the fact to our Superiors as to persons given us by God to guide us in our vocation."

"Do you think that's a means of overcoming the temptation? Yes, it certainly is, and it's an infallible one, provided it's used sincerely and with the intention of following the advice that will be given us; for nothing wards off the blows of the devil so surely as to mention them; as soon as he sees he has been discovered, he leaves the field. That's why, Sisters, it's a good thing for those who feel tempted to go to the Superior and state frankly and truly the exact
state of affairs: 'I feel tempted for such and such a reason, Monsieur. That gives me certain ideas; please tell me what I should do.' And, Sisters, believe what the Superior tells you, for it's not much good to ask for advice if you don’t follow it. When a sick person asks the doctor what diet he should follow and then, instead of listening to him, does just the opposite, he’ll become even sicker. The same holds true of spiritual ills; if you don’t comply with the advice God gives you by your Superiors and if, instead of following it, you raise objections like, ‘Yes, he told me that, but he doesn’t know the real state of affairs,’ rest assured that your condition, instead of improving, will only grow worse.

"Would it be a good thing, Sister, for a person who is in this state to speak of it to another Sister?"

"I don’t think so, Monsieur, because the person to whom it’s said may fall into the same temptation."

"You’re right, Sister; no, it should be mentioned only to those to whom God has given the grace to assist you in your temptation. A poor Sister is working away peacefully without a thought of anything else but her doing her duty; if you go and tell her your troubles, instead of helping you in them, she’ll find herself in difficulties, and you’ll only ruin each other. Furthermore, that’s giving bad example; it’s giving scandal. This Sister thought you were one of those most attached to your vocation, but now she’ll be frightened at seeing you tempted, unaware that it’s in accord with God’s plan and, instead of helping you, she’ll harm you, and perhaps be lost as well as yourself.

"Another means, Sister? Aren’t you aware of any?" To which the Sister replied that temptations should be resisted the moment they arise and shouldn’t be allowed entrance into our hearts.

"That’s the great, sovereign remedy, for if we close our hearts and ears to temptation, the devil will indeed have a hard time carrying out his plans! To help us in this, it’s well to turn to God the moment we feel tempted and to say to Him, ‘My God, You see where the enemy is attacking me and You know how weak I am; please help and sustain me so I won’t fall.’ And it would be well for those to whom God has granted the grace of giving themselves more per-
fectly to Him and who have promised to serve Him in the Company, to renew their vows; yes indeed, that would be a good thing! It gives renewed strength and draws down new graces. Those who can do so and who are in this state should adopt this means with humility and with the confidence that God will assist them; those who aren’t yet bound by vows should renew their resolution as soon as they feel shaken. ‘Alas, my God! I’m on the point of giving in, unless you sustain me; have pity on my weakness and don’t let me fall.’ And let them make known their temptation.”

Another Sister said, in reference to the first point, that the reward was a strong reason for persevering. Another good reason is the fear that God might abandon us in a state that isn’t in conformity with His Will.

“Sister, what becomes of a Daughter of Charity who forfeits her vocation?”

I think she runs a great risk of being lost.”

“Mon Dieu,” said M. Vincent, joining his hands and raising his eyes to Heaven, “mon Dieu, mon Dieu, we mustn’t judge! That’s reserved to God. We still have to pray for her and humble ourselves, but never speak or think of those who have left. There’s reason to believe that Sisters who have died in the Company are now at rest, by the mercy of God. Ah, well! in nomine Domini!

“Would you please tell us your thoughts, Sister?”

“Apart from a special reason obliging me to persevere in my vocation, I also perceived that, as a rule, the call comes from God and subsequent ones are a temptation rather than a call. Another reason is that the end of all our good actions crowns the work; so, if we want to be crowned, we must persevere until death, following the example of Our Lord, who wasn’t satisfied with becoming man, but persevered until death in the work of our redemption.

“On the second point, it seemed to me that when we feel shaken, we must try not to dwell on those feelings of disgust, and avoid like poison to our soul anything that may induce us to talk about them. We should turn to God and say what Pilate said about the inscription on the Cross, ‘What is done, is done,’ and disregard every
thought contrary to our original resolution. We can also ask our Superiors to help us to resist the temptation."

"Sisters, before going any further and so as to teach those who aren't sure of what we're discussing, let me tell you what a vocation is. A vocation is a call from God to do something. The vocation of the Apostles was a call from God to implant the faith throughout the world; the vocation of a religious is a call from God to observe the Rules of religious life; the vocation of married persons is a call from God to serve Him in establishing a family and raising children; the vocation of a Daughter of Charity is the call of God, the choice His Goodness has made of her, rather than of so many others who came to His mind, to serve Him in all the ministries proper to this state of life to which He allows the Sisters to devote themselves. Your vocation, then, Sisters, is of such a nature that God, from among so many thousands of millions, looked on you, you who are with the children, you who are with the convicts, you who are in the Motherhouse, in the hospitals, in the villages, in the parishes and said, while choosing you, one from this place, another from that, 'I want this soul to sanctify herself by serving me in such or such a ministry.'

"And that, Sisters, is your vocation. When God makes His choice, He often calls you by means unknown to you, but most often by the desire He gives you for it and your perseverence in seeking admission. After that, Sisters, you shouldn't say to yourselves, 'But is it God who has willed this?' For when you reason in that way, very often it's because you experience difficulty in the practice of the humility, submission, and obedience you need, and which the devil tries to make impossible for you. God is steadfast in His judgments, Sisters. The salvation of souls is so dear to Him that He takes all the care needed to put them on the easiest path to arrive on the road to heaven. But don't try to leave it, for as soon as a man who has set out on a long journey leaves the highway or turns off from it, he's in danger of finding only paths that will lead him far from the place to which he was going.

"The person who would transplant trees shortly before the season for bearing fruit, then dig them up again to plant them some-
where else, would never gather any fruit; trees moved about from place to place and from soil to soil would even be in danger of dying.

“Judas, whom God called to be an Apostle and to whom He had given so many graces, thought he’d do better in another way of life. You all know his story and how he destroyed himself. But, by the mercy of God, his place didn’t remain vacant, and God called Saint Paul from the Gentile world in which he was plunged to make him a worthy vessel of election.¹

“Let’s go on, in nomine Domini. Sister, please tell us your thoughts.”

“The reason we have to persevere to the end is that perseverance merits the crown and, on the contrary, for want of perseverance, we may lose the merit of all we’ve done until now and fall into a deplorable state of abandonment, as a punishment for the loss of our vocation. I fear this so strongly that I ask God daily to let me die instead. On the second point, I thought it well to be strongly attached to God, who is steadfast; to motivate myself to observe the practices proper to our vocation by considering the glory we can render to God and by the hope of the rewards promised to those who do what we should do; above all, to believe firmly that we’ve been called by God and that every thought to the contrary comes from the devil; to be on our guard against dallying with temptation but to represent it to God in a loving way, to ask His assistance and to commend ourselves to the Guardian Angel of the Company.”

“And you, Sister, please tell me why we’re obliged to persevere in our vocation.”

“Because God has placed us in it.”

“Would there be any danger, Sister, in leaving the place where you know God has willed you to be?”

“I think it would stir up God’s wrath against us and oblige Him to abandon us.”

¹Saint Vincent implies here that Saint Paul was chosen to replace Judas. In Acts 1:21-26 it is related that Mathias was chosen by lot to replace Judas. Paul, the “Apostle of the Gentiles,” was a Jew, as he himself declares (cf. Acts:22), but by his birth in Tarsus (Cilicia) he was also a Roman citizen.
“Mon Dieu! what an important remark she has just made! Sisters, please pay close attention to it. ‘Because,’ said she, ‘God has placed us in it.’ Have you ever heard of a soldier deserting the post where his captain had placed him? A soldier posted as a sentry by his captain remains there, come rain, wind, or hail; whether he’s frozen with cold or cannons are discharged at him; he may not depart, even if he has to die. And if he is so cowardly as to desert, there’s no mercy for him; he is shot because he didn’t remain in the place where his captain had posted him.

“What other reason do you have, Sister?”

“It seems to me, Monsieur, that it would be better never to have come than to leave, because one’s soul is in a state of torment and I think one can’t be at peace.”

“You can be sure of that, Sister, one couldn’t be at peace. Alas! I know some women who are after me every day, begging me through all sorts of persons to take them back. Even yesterday someone came to me on behalf of one of them, and the other day it was for another one, saying, ‘Monsieur, this poor girl will never have any peace; she’s languishing.’ Now, Sisters, they’re not all at that point, for there are some who are insensitive. But most of them are so restless that they don’t know where to turn, and it’s very true that it would have been better had they never come. Alas! they wouldn’t have to be accountable for the graces they’ve wasted. The Master of the Sentences\(^2\) regards the perseverance of a girl or woman as so important that he says that the woman who knows how to resist temptations hurls the demon into hell. The devil is condemned to be eternally in hell, and although he leaves it to tempt people, he still carries his hell with him. And the woman who has the strength to resist him causes him such dismay that she hurls him into the depths of hell, never more to leave it. It’s the Master of the Sentences, Sisters, first among the theologians, who says this. Now, just as this plunges the devil into profound sadness, it also gives joy to God—yes, joy to God. That a woman, a poor girl, can give joy to God! Yes, she can! God regards and takes pleasure in seeing our fi-

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\(^2\)Peter Lombard (1095-1160), whose Sentences was one of the pedagogical foundations for the systematic study of theology throughout Europe in the ages prior to Saint Vincent.
delity in the midst of temptations. And He rejoices when, despite all 
the battles of flesh and blood, despite all the cunning of the evil 
spirit, we persevere in what we've undertaken for love of Him.

"And you, Sister, what should we do when we feel tempted? 
What means do you think we can use to resist?" The Sister replied 
that it would be well to reread the resolutions taken during retreats.  
"Oh! Sisters, what an excellent means! For these were thoughts that 
came to us from God when we were conversing very familiarly with 
Him; they're provisions that He gave us for our time of need. And 
that's why it's very good for us to gather them together so we can 
use them in time of need. Those who can't read should have them 
read aloud and each of you should say, 'Wasn't it God who gave me 
that thought? Wasn't I urged on by some good motive to take that 
resolution?' You'll certainly find that an excellent means to resume 
once more what you began, Sisters.

"Someone may say, 'But is there anyone who isn't tempted? For 
that's a heavy enough burden. How can we always know if they're 
temptations?' To this I answer yes, Sisters; there are persons who 
aren't tempted, and these persons are of two sorts. The first are 
those who do whatever comes into their head. As soon as they feel 
envious, they yield to this. They don't experience the temptation 
because they give in to it at once. And since they don't resist, they 
say they're not tempted. The others are spiritual persons to whom 
divine things are so pleasant and agreeable that they never experi-
ence feelings of repugnance. I will tell you, however, that all God's 
servants generally are tempted. It's Saint Paul who says so.

'I've known only two servants of God who weren't tempted. 
One was converted from the religion,\(^3\) and he became a priest. 
Since his conversion he has never had any trials, never any feelings 
of repugnance, nor the slightest thought in the world contrary to per-
fection, and so content in his state that he couldn't be more so. The 
other was a woman who devoted herself to good works and the de-
vout life, in which she made great progress. She never felt any 
temptation contrary to the good she was doing. Now, what hap-

\(^3\)The Huguenot religion.
pened to those two persons? They were tempted by not being tempted. They would say, 'I know quite well that all God’s servants are tried, are subject to temptation, and that the devil leaves in peace only those who belong to him. How is it, then, that I’m not tempted, that I feel nothing to the contrary? Doubtless, God is not concerned with me.’ Not to be tempted was a stronger temptation for them than if they had actually been tempted; it was the heaviest cross they could bear.

“Sister, would you please tell us what thought you had on the topic of this conference?” The Sister replied that, as long as we loved our Rules, God wouldn’t permit us to lose our vocation.

“Blessed be God, Sisters! Those are so many motives and means for being faithful to our vocation and for resisting temptations against it. I’m pressed for time and won’t stop to recapitulate them, but I’ll just say about the last remark that it’s true, Sisters, that as long as you love your Rules, God won’t permit you to lose your vocation. Was any Sister who left us exact in her Rules? You won’t find a single one. One of them failed to observe one article, another failed to observe another; not one of them kept everything. You saw a certain negligence in the way they did things—as if they were merely doing them for form’s sake, and never that spirit of fervor and recollection we should have when we set out to please God. So, love your Rules, dear Sisters; keep them as the path by which God wants to lead you to himself, and rest assured that as long as you follow them, God, who has prescribed them for you, given them to you, and placed you on the road to practice them—rest assured, I repeat, that He won’t allow you to go astray.

“When Our Lord told His Apostles everything they had to do, He didn’t promise them wealth in this world; He didn’t say to them, ‘You will be at rest; you will be at peace; you will have nothing to do but serve Me; nothing will hinder you,’ but rather, ‘You will have to testify before kings, etc.’ He promised them crosses, trials, and sufferings and, in their persons, He promised this to those who would wish to follow Him. Saint Paul wasn’t exempt from temptations. He endured very painful and very violent ones. So, let’s not be surprised, Sisters, if we’re sometimes tried, but let’s make use of
the means God gives us to resist them; above all, let's ask Him for the grace for ourselves and for all our Sisters to die a thousand times—if that were possible—rather than ever to consent to the temptations our enemy may send us against our vocation.

“This is what I ask you, my God, for myself, for all our Sisters here present, and for those who are not. We are weak, my God, and capable of giving in at the first assault. You have called us by pure mercy; may Your infinite goodness be pleased to preserve us. On our part, with the help of Your holy grace, we will do all in our power to render You all the services and all the fidelity You await from us.

“Grant us, then, my God, grant us the grace to persevere until death. I ask You this by the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, confident that You will grant it to me. I will now pronounce the words of blessing, with which I entreat You to bestow on the entire Company the spirit that from all eternity You have willed it to have. *Benedictio Dei Patris...*"

33. - PURITY OF INTENTION

July 11

“The first point of this conference deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity should perform all their actions in a spirit of charity and with God in view, that is, Sisters, with the intention of pleasing God; second, some means to be taken in order to perform all our actions in this way, and third, the evils that may arise, or the harm there is in not doing our actions with this intention.

“That's the subject of the present conference, Sisters. It has been a long time since we've had such an important one, because it's the