in your service.’ Then each one renews his oath of fidelity. Those who are at a distance and can’t come send a representative.

“In the same way, dear Sisters, if you see someone, as I’ve just mentioned to you, who has failed in her promise regarding her vocation, rouse your heart to greater fidelity and say, ‘No, my God, even if all the Sisters should fail, with the help of Your grace, I’ll be steadfast.’

“Well, that’s enough for now; I don’t have much time and won’t delay any longer by explaining the other means to you, in the hope that the goodness of God, who has suggested them to you, will give you the grace to make use of them whenever and wherever you need them. Meanwhile I entreat Him with all my heart to animate all of you with His true and holy love, to give us the infallible marks of it, and to grant us the grace to grow in it ever more and more, so that, aided by this grace, we may begin in this world what we’ll be doing eternally in the next, to which we ask the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to lead us.”

42. - LOVE OF WORK

November 28, 1649

“Sisters, this conference deals with the importance for Daughters of Charity to work during the time they’re free either from the service of persons who are poor or from teaching children, in places where they’re not too busy. The first point concerns the reasons for working to earn part of their living; the second, the kind of work they should undertake; the third, what they should do so that God may be as pleased with this work as with their assistance to the sick and their other ministries.

“These are the three points we have to discuss, Sisters. Let’s look at the reasons why Daughters of Charity must keep busy in places where they can do so without detriment to the service of the sick

Conference 42. - MS. SV 9, pp. 191ff.
poor or to the education of children, as in the villages or in some small parishes in Paris.

“Sister, tell us why a Daughter of Charity should work to earn part of her living.”

“On the first point, it seemed to me, Father, that we must keep busy because Our Lord recommended that we make good use of our time; secondly, because we’re poor; and in the third place, because idleness generates bad thoughts and conversations and often destroys what grace has established in us, and which we might have preserved if we had kept busy. On the second point, it seemed to me that the work we can undertake includes spinning, sewing, and other common occupations, which we don’t lack. On the third point, it seemed to me that one good means is to be devoted to it.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “I think we should work in imitation of Our Lord who worked so hard when He was on earth. On the second point, I thought, as Sister just mentioned, that occupations such as sewing and spinning are the most suitable ones for us. As for means, I think that care and diligence will be good ones for us, keeping in mind that we always have to work, and always to work as if we had to hurry because, when we go slowly, we don’t make much progress, and when we think there’s only a little to be done, we’re not concerned with going more quickly.”

“Father,” added another Sister, “it seems to me that one reason to inspire us not to waste time is the example of the Blessed Virgin, who was never idle. As for the type of work, I don’t see any others than those pointed out by our Sisters, except for the Sisters at the Motherhouse who have special duties and offices. A good means for making our work acceptable to God is to have some good thoughts while we’re working and not to allow ourselves any useless ones.”

“God bless you, Sister!” said Most Honored Father. “And you, Sister?”

“One reason why we have to work to earn part of our living is that our vocation has the honor of imitating the laborious life of the Son of God; consequently, since He worked with Saint Joseph and His holy Mother to earn His living, so should we. A second reason is
that we don’t bring any money with us to the Motherhouse for our subsistence so we must earn our living by our work. A third is that most of us would be obliged to earn our living if we were in the world. A fourth is that this is a good way to establish our Company in solid virtue, especially in humility, which Our Lord so strongly recommended to those who want to follow Him, and which He esteemed so highly that He practiced it himself all His life.”

“It seems to me, Father,” stated another Sister, “that one motive for being concerned with earning part of our living is to imitate Our Lord, Saint Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin His holy mother, who worked all their lives. In addition, our Company professes poverty. A third reason is that, if the belief that we didn’t have to work to earn our living was introduced into the Company, we’d soon become lazy and our Company would go to ruin. Lastly, there’s nothing so harmful to a good life as idleness.

“On the second point, namely, the work we should do when we have some leisure time from nursing the sick and looking after the schoolchildren, or the observances of our Rules, it seemed to me that each, according to her ability, could do some of the necessary occupations, such as sewing, spinning, and others that would benefit the house or poor persons, and not things that occupy our mind too much and cause us to become engrossed in them. When I thought over how we should act so that our work may be pleasing to God and helpful to the poor, I thought that, when I begin it, I should make the intention of pleasing God by honoring the work Our Lord Jesus Christ did on earth; and second, not to undertake anything without permission and to be prepared to give up the work when we’re told to do so or when the service of the poor demands it.”

After our most worthy Father, with his usual charity and patience, had heard what each Sister he had questioned had to say on the subject, he began to speak as follows: “Sisters, I thank God for the thoughts His Goodness has given you on the present topic; all of them are good, important, useful, and practical, but, because we don’t have much time, I’m not going to dwell on them.

“I’ll add just two things that occurred to me, Sisters, one of which is that God has expressly commanded us to earn our living by
the sweat of our brow; *in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane,*¹ He said; you shall earn your living by the sweat of your brow, that is, Sisters, by hard, painstaking labor. This commandment is so definite that no one can be exempted from it, and the work such that, by the grace of God, it serves us as a penance by the fatigue it causes the body. God didn’t simply say, ‘You shall labor with the powers of your mind to earn your bread,’ but ‘you shall labor by the sweat of your brow,’ you shall not only labor with your mind but with your hands, your arms, your entire body, and you shall work so hard that sweat will drip from your brow. That, dear Sisters, is how we should understand God’s commandment, which everyone is bound to obey.

“The peasant we see going to his plow to till the soil and to produce the grain that will feed people fulfills this commandment, for his body suffers from it and toils at it, with the result that sweat often pours down his face.

“The Sister from the Charity who goes out morning and evening, carrying her soup pot in hot and cold weather, not for herself but for some poor person who can’t go to her for it and who would languish from need if she didn’t take it to him, that Sister also fulfills this commandment, dear Sisters.

“The second reason, Sisters, is that God, addressing the just man, says that he’ll live by the work of his hands—as if He had wanted to make us understand that his greatest obligation, after that of rendering to God the service he owes Him, is to work to earn his living—and that He’ll bless the pains he takes in such a way that no one will ever see him in need, he’ll never be dependent on anyone, he’ll live and support his family by the work of his hands, and all will go well with him. God even promises to work with him and, by working, he will bless God.

“That’s how the just man lives, dear Sisters; he lives, in accordance with God’s command, by the work of his hands, and is a burden on no one. But the unjust man won’t do that; because he won’t take the trouble of working, he’ll be a burden on others; he’ll beg for his livelihood or steal. Note the difference; one is on good terms with

¹Cf. Gn 3:19. (NAB)
God and others; he lives in the observance of the commandments of God and has a sufficiency of the necessities of life; the other is offensive to God, unbearable to decent people, and almost to himself because of the penury to which his idleness reduces him.

"I’m not implying that all those who live comfortably are just, dear Sisters, nor that all those who suffer from want are unjust, because we often see that, by God’s permission, the wicked prosper and the good are unsuccessful. I do say, however, that no one has ever seen anyone to whom God hasn’t given more than sufficient means of livelihood, when the person has been willing to work for it.

"As opposed to the blessings God has given to the just, we have the maledictions fulminated by Him in Sacred Scripture against the idle. He refers the slothful to the ants: ‘Go, you sluggard’ He says, ‘and learn from the ant what you should do.’

"The ant, dear Sisters, is a little creature to which God has given such foresight that it brings to the community all it can amass during the summer and harvest time, to be used during the winter. You see, dear Sisters, the ant doesn’t appropriate it to his personal use but brings it to the little community storehouse for the others. Bees do the same during the summer. They store up the honey they gather from flowers so they can live on it during the winter; like the ants, they, too, bring it to the community. They’re only tiny creatures, the tiniest on earth, and God has implanted in them this instinct to work, so He refers us to them to learn from their example how to work with foresight.

"The third reason we have, as was mentioned—*mon Dieu!* it was mentioned and other beautiful ideas were added to it—is this, namely, that God himself works incessantly, has worked incessantly, and will work incessantly. He works from all eternity within himself by the eternal generation of His Son, whom He’ll never cease to beget. The Father and the Son have never stopped loving each other, and this mutual love has eternally produced the Holy Spirit, by whom all graces have been, are, and will be distributed to us.

\[2\text{Cf. Prv 6:6. (NAB)}\]
“God also works incessantly from outside himself in the creation and preservation of this great universe, in the movements of the heavens, in the influences of the stars, in the productions of land and sea, in the nature of the atmosphere, in the regulation of the seasons, and in all that beautiful order we observe in nature, which would be destroyed and return to nothingness if God was not constantly guiding it.

“In addition to this general work, He toils with each individual: with the craftsman in his shop, with the woman in her household, with the ant and the bee to do their collecting, and He does so constantly and continually. And why does He labor? For us, dear Sisters, only for us, to preserve our lives and to procure for us everything we need. Eh quoi! If a God, Emperor of the entire world, has never for a single moment stopped working interiorly and exteriorly ever since the world has been the world, and even in the lowliest of earth’s productions, with which He cooperates, how much more reasonable that we, who are His creatures, should work, as He’s said, in the sweat of our brow! A God works incessantly, and a Daughter of Charity would remain idle! She’d convince herself that all she has to do is to serve poor persons! And when she has few or none of them, she’d remain idle! Let’s be very careful about that, dear Sisters; let’s avoid idleness like death—what am I saying? Let’s avoid it as we would avoid hell.

“‘But we’re busy from morning till night, Monsieur; we scarcely have time to eat our meals, and most often, not on time.’ Well and good, dear Sisters. I praise God for that with all my heart. I would hope that it might please His Goodness that all of you would be like that. I know that in Paris there’s a great deal of work, that very often three wouldn’t suffice for what two have to do, and that if there were forty-eight hours in the day, you’d find plenty to keep you busy; but I’m also well aware that there isn’t the same amount of work in the country, that everywhere there aren’t enough patients to take up all your time, and that in Paris itself there are parishes where the work isn’t so heavy. Granted, there aren’t many of these parishes, but there are always a few, and I’m speaking mainly of
them, dear Sisters, although you should never waste time in a single
one of them.

“If you really knew the misery entailed by idleness, dear Sisters,
you’d avoid it as you would avoid hell. It has been said—and it’s
true—that it’s the cause of bad thoughts and conversations. Alas!
that’s only too true, Sisters; it’s their wet-nurse. How will two per­
sons with nothing to do occupy themselves, if not first of all in use­
less and dangerous conversations? Then they’ll go on to make
damaging and disparaging remarks, gossip, fabricate lies, murmur
against Superiors, criticize the Rules, speak contemptuously of
them and build castles in the air. Don’t I myself know what extrava­
gant notions can pass through an idle mind? They’ll have a thou­
sand bad thoughts, a thousand unclean fancies about this man or
that woman, about some young man they met—although, by the
mercy of God, I know of no such persons among you, dear Sisters,
and that His Goodness preserves you from these disorders in a very
special way. Yes, we can say to the glory of God that He takes spe­
cial care to preserve your purity, but this mustn’t be abused.

“Idleness also generates petty grudges, problems, and jealousy.
Often these are purely imaginary and groundless. An idle person
will make a thousand reflections contrary to the respect she owes to
God; she’ll destroy that peace she ought to make reign in her soul
and will form judgments contrary to the charity she owes her neigh­
bors.

“What did Our Lord do when He lived on earth, dear Sisters?
Someone has said it, so I have little, and almost nothing, to add. I’ll
simply say that He led two lives on earth. One, from His birth until
His thirtieth year, during which He worked to earn His living in the
sweat of His divine brow. His trade was that of a carpenter; he was a
hod carrier, an unskilled laborer, and a bricklayer’s assistant. From
His youth He worked from morning till night and continued until
He died. Heaven and earth blush with shame at the sight of such a
spectacle.

“That, dear Sisters, is how God acted—God, the Sovereign Lord
of the whole world, to whom all creatures owe infinite honor. We
see Him living by the work of His hands, in the lowliest and most
difficult occupation there was; and we, wretched, miserable crea-
tures, we would be useless! And a Daughter of Charity would want
to spare herself!

"The other stage of the life of Jesus Christ on earth is from the
age of thirty until His death. During those three years what did He
not do, day and night, going off to preach without a break, now in
the temple, now in a village, in order to convert the world and to win
over souls to His Father? During that time, what do you think He
lived on, dear Sisters? He possessed nothing on earth, not even a
stone on which to lay His divine head, in which Eternal Wisdom
dwelt. So, He lived on the alms given Him by Mary Magdalen and
the other devout women who followed Him to listen to His ser-
mons. He went to the homes of those who invited Him and contin-
ued to work day and night and at all hours, sometimes going to
places where He knew souls might be won, sometimes to the home
of a sick person, to heal first his body, then his soul. In this, He
wanted to point out two stages to the Daughters of Charity who
serve the sick: one, during which they look after their temporal
needs, and the other, while serving them or after having done so,
during which time they may say some good word to encourage
them to make a good confession, to prepare them to die well, or to
take good resolutions to lead a better life, in the event that God
should restore them to health. To act in this way, dear Sisters, is to
imitate Our Lord’s conduct on earth; and to earn your living in this
way, without wasting time, is to earn it as Our Lord did.

"Saint Paul, that great Apostle and thoroughly divine man, that
vessel of election, earned his living by the work of his hands. In the
midst of his heavy labors, his important ministries, his continual
preaching, he took time, either by night or by day, to be
self-sufficient so as not to have to ask for anything from anyone.
‘You know,’ he says in one of his talks, ‘that I’ve demanded noth-
ing of you, and that the bread I eat to sustain my body was earned by
my own hands.’ 3 Who will not blush with shame at such an exam-
ple? It wasn’t a young woman who was speaking, nor an ordinary

3Cf. Acts 20:33-34. (NAB)
man, but a man of good social standing by birth, learning, and virtue; and this man had such a high opinion of the holy poverty taught by Jesus Christ that he would have scrupled eating a piece of bread that he had not earned. If his important ministries didn’t allow him to work during the day, he’d take some time from his night’s rest.

“In those days it was a holy custom in the Church for everyone to work. In the beginning, members of religious Orders earned their own living. After assisting at Divine Office, they busied themselves making mats and wicker baskets, which they would sell. And this was done even in Saint Bernard’s day; four hundred years ago his religious and he himself worked. But, since everything grows slack with time, this holy custom was done away with, and that has had serious consequences, for since then domestic discipline has ceased to be as austere as when religious were subject to work.

“Now, do you see, dear Sisters, how good it is for you to work, for then you’re no burden in the places to which you’re called? That’s an important point because, that being the case, you can always render service to God, and with commendation, even though you shouldn’t seek it. You won’t be obliged to ask for more than people can give you. And should you happen to have more than you need, you know that the surplus is used to form other young women who will one day render service to God as you do and will serve their neighbor, and God will be glorified by them. Members of religious Orders render service to God and are the support of the Church, but most of them—at least those in the mendicant Orders—are dependent. It’s true that they do no wrong in this because that’s their Rule. Take, for instance, the Franciscans, who practice such strict poverty; such a life is great in the sight of God, but they’re dependent and possess nothing; they live in destitution and poverty because they have no endowments. But you, you can earn a sufficient livelihood by serving your neighbor; you’re not a burden on anyone; you provide for yourselves. Would to God that I could do the same, I who am unworthy of the bread I eat; would that it were permissible for me to earn my living and to be able to serve my neighbor without possessing anything or being dependent on anyone! Would to God that our priests could do so and that we were
obliged to forsake everything we have! God knows how willingly we’d do so. But we can’t, and we have to humble ourselves because of it.

“If God is pleased to grant you the grace of being able some day to earn your living, dear Sisters, and to be able to serve villages that are unable to support you, I know of nothing more beautiful. Quoi! by working for others, Sisters will be in a place where they’ll be serving poor persons and educating girls with no contributions whatever, able to do so thanks to the work they themselves have done during their free time! What a favor, Sisters, and what a blessing of God that you who are already in a village or in the parishes, serving persons who are poor and teaching children, contribute by your work to help others do the same good in the future by bringing your surplus to the Community! If, as we’ve already seen, bees do this by gathering honey from flowers and taking it back to the hive to feed the others, why wouldn’t you, who should be like heavenly bees, do likewise? If God is pleased, Sisters, to grant this grace to your Company, that, through you, poor persons will be served, children instructed, and this house enabled to subsist as it has hitherto done and to admit and form the young women who present themselves with the intention of serving God, and who, in their turn, will render Him the same services as you do, won’t that be a great happiness for you? You’re obliged to do this, as far as you can, dear Sisters; at least you should never neglect to do anything for this purpose. Let each of you say to herself, ‘This is the house in which I’ve been raised; they did me the kindness of accepting me and welcoming me here; it’s only reasonable for me to do my share in defraying its expenses so that it can continue to extend the same charity to the Sisters who come after us, and the Company may not stop nor discontinue the good it has begun.’

“That good is substantial, Sisters, greater than you could imagine or than I can express. Take, for instance, two Sisters living in a parish; what do they not do? What do we hear people say of their way of life? It’s a life absolutely divine, a life like Jesus Christ led on earth; God works continually with them, and He really must, dear Sisters, for they wouldn’t be able to do what they’re doing. I’m
thinking right now of two of our Sisters, who are in a place where they don’t have much to do and have enough to live on; I’m worried about them and fear that this may be an occasion for them to grow lax and become lazy. I’d prefer that the foundation had not been made, dear Sisters, because that will cause the ruin of your Company. When our Sisters are comfortably established and don’t have enough to do, they’ll neglect the work they do have and won’t bother going to visit the poor. Then we’ll have to say good-bye to the Charity; it’s no longer the Charity; it’s buried; then we’ll have the funeral of the Charity. That’s what will happen if God doesn’t maintain it. I myself won’t see it, for I won’t be on this earth much longer; but you, to whom God will give a long life, you’ll see it.

“So, give yourselves to God, dear Sisters, to work earnestly, in imitation of His Divine Majesty who works unceasingly, although He needs nothing; and, like the bees, bring your surplus to the Community so that, once you’ve made provision for your own needs, you’ll be contributing to the formation of other Sisters.

“But what jobs can we do? We can’t undertake something that requires a lot of time; furthermore, we don’t know how to do everything people may give us to do.’ My reply to that, Sisters, is that sewing and spinning are the most suitable jobs you can do. Everyone needs linen, and you can be sure that, if you take on that kind of work, you’ll always have plenty to do, either for your own use, or for the poor, or for children, or others; you’ll never be without it.

“But what should we do to make this work pleasing to Our Lord?’ Someone said it, dear Sisters, and such beautiful remarks have been added to that. In the first place, you must work to please God, who takes His joy and delight in seeing you busily engaged for a good purpose. Now, rest assured that your aim is pleasing to Him. So have no doubts that you’re doing something acceptable to God.

“Secondly, the goal of your work should be to honor the painful, exhausting toil of Our Lord on earth, who lent His divine body to the heaviest labors, without sparing himself.

“In the third place, you must do it with the thought that you’re working to serve your neighbor, who is so dear to God that He considers as done to himself whatever is done for the relief of others.
In the fourth place, we have to rid ourselves of the spirit of avarice. Someone made a good remark when she said that we mustn’t have things with a view to profit. O mon Dieu! no! that would spoil everything. If a Daughter of Charity planned, by working, to amass one écu after another in order to have money on hand or to be better fed, that would be displeasing to God and would give bad example to good people.

‘Monsieur,’ a gentleman said to me yesterday, ‘for the last eight years I’ve given myself to God not to make any profit from my possessions. Once I’m fed and clothed, I give the surplus to the poor. I’m well aware that I won’t be able to provide a position for my son, but I couldn’t act otherwise.’ He’s a man of the world, dear Sisters, who doesn’t have to do anything, and who has children; yet, after simply providing himself with the necessities of life, he gives everything else to the poor, even going so far as to sell and mortgage his property. We should sell ourselves to rescue our brothers and sisters from destitution, and would a Daughter of Charity be so despicable as to reserve something for herself and say, ‘How do I know what may happen? I may not always be a member of the Company; if I should leave it, I’d always have this.’ Oh! that cursed ‘How do I know!’ A damnable idea, suggested by the demon to be an occasion for the downfall of those Sisters who would listen to him! It’s not that I’m aware that any of you are so inclined; I know that all of you are attached to the Motherhouse and well disposed in its regard.

I ask God, who, from all eternity, worked within himself; I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who worked here on earth, even as a laborer; I ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to work hard; I ask Saint Paul, who earned by the work of his hands the bread on which he subsisted; I ask all those holy religious who did manual labor and achieved sanctity that it may please the goodness of God to forgive us for the time we’ve so often wasted, especially myself, who am most unworthy of the bread I eat and which God gives me; I repeat, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the grace to work in imitation of Him; I ask the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to obtain this grace for us from the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name and on whose
infinite goodness I rely, I will now pronounce the words of blessing.  
Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”

43. - HOW TO ACT AMID DIFFICULTIES  
WHEN FAR FROM THE MOTHERHOUSE  

April 19, 1650

“The subject of the present conference, dear Sisters, is what  
Daughters of Charity should do when they are living away from the  
Mother House, especially in the country and in very distant places,  
and have a temporal or spiritual difficulty; for instance, when  
they’re in doubt and are distressed interiorly concerning their  
Rules—for, at times some are contradictory in their ministries—or  
difficulties regarding imperfections, inconveniences, or devotional  
practices, and especially confession, Communion, physical mortifi­ 
cations, and interior communications.

“The topic is divided into three points, Sisters. The first deals  
with the reasons we have for knowing clearly how to act when such  
difficulties arise outside the Motherhouse; the second, what we  
should do in those circumstances; the third, what each Sister has  
done when she found herself in similar trials, and some resolutions  
to take on this point for the future.

“This conference, Sisters, doesn’t concern the Sisters of this  
house nor the ones who live in Paris, because they’re at the source  
of the remedies, but only those living in the country, especially in  
very distant places, where they’re perhaps deprived of any consola­ 
tion and unable to have the problem solved by their Superiors be­ 
because the matter is too urgent and the distance too great. But  
because each and every one of you should be ready to set off at once  
to wherever you may be sent, it’s good for each of you to know what  
she should do if she finds herself in a place where she might have  
this need.

Conference 43. - MS. SV 9, pp. 200ff.
“Isn’t it important, Sister,” said M. Vincent, turning to a Sister, “for us to know how we should act when we’re far from the Motherhouse and some difficulty arises for which we may need advice?”

“It seems to me, Monsieur, that one reason for wanting to be informed about what we have to do in such needs is that it will put our minds very much at ease if we are.”

“And what would you do, Sister, if some trial or temptation arose when you were far away and didn’t know where to turn for advice?”

“Since we don’t go alone to places, I think it would be appropriate, Monsieur, to mention it to the Sister with whom I’d be living.”

“Yes, Sister, you’re right, but it should be done prudently and according to the nature of the matter. If, for instance, it concerns the care of the sick or the instruction of children, you may—and even should—say something like, ‘Mon Dieu! Sister, I’m worried because it seems as if the care of the patients here isn’t what I’ve seen it to be elsewhere; I notice a certain abuse. What do you think? Can’t we do something about it?’ The same for schools. But if the problem were such that the Sister might not be able to suggest any way to solve it, or even if it were prudent to conceal it from her, then you might say to her, ‘Please don’t worry if you see that I’m a little sad, Sister; I have something on my mind. Just pray for me. I hope from the goodness of God that this will pass, but I’m so weak that I can’t help showing it.’

“You also said that you should have confidence in the person given you as your spiritual guide, Sister. Yes; in fact, that’s a great means of setting your mind at rest. If you think of something that’s bothering you, for which you may feel the need of advice, turn confidently to him. God won’t allow him to say anything that isn’t for your good.”

When another Sister remarked that it was good to put one’s mind at rest and to try to be patient, M. Vincent added, “Sister has said, and rightly so, that once you’ve think you’ve done all you should have on that point, if you’ve told another Sister about your trouble and no remedy is found for it, or if it should be something we may not share with her without worrying her, and if you’ve mentioned it
to the confessor appointed by your Superiors and you’re still not at peace, then you have to believe that God is allowing it to be this way, adore His guidance, practice patience, and strive to preserve peace of mind amid worry or temptation.”

Another Sister said that she had found no better means than to kneel at the foot of the crucifix and tell her troubles to Our Lord with confidence and submission, resigning herself to His holy Will. “You’re so very right, Sister, and that’s one of the best means you could find to do the Will of God and to be at peace. That has been the practice of nearly all the saints. I remember that the late wife of the General of the Galleys\(^1\) used to do that. Once, her confessor\(^2\) was traveling to a place fifty leagues away, and she said to him, ‘Well, Monsieur, you’re going away; to whom shall I turn in my troubles?’ ‘Madame,’ he replied, ‘God will provide. You could go to Monsieur X and Monsieur Y, the former for your ordinary confessions, and the latter for advice if the other one doesn’t satisfy you; and if neither of them brings you peace of soul, I advise you, Madame, to seek it at the foot of the crucifix. There you will lovingly present all your difficulties to the Son of God, you will make acts of trust and of resignation to His good pleasure, honoring the abandonment in which He found himself when in a similar state, deserted by those who had the greatest obligations toward Him, and deprived of all tangible consolation to the point where He believed himself abandoned by His Eternal Father. There you will contemplate the use He made of His sufferings, Madame, and, with the help of His grace, you’ll have a happier outcome than I can tell you.’

“This good lady did as she was told, Sisters, and a few days later she wrote to her confessor: ‘I’ve tried the means you suggested for finding peace of mind in my troubles, Monsieur, but I’ve found none better than that of kneeling at the foot of a crucifix. What men said to me wasn’t what I was looking for, but I did find it there, along with all the consolation that creatures were unable to give me.’

\(^1\)Madame de Gondi.
\(^2\)Saint Vincent himself.
“That’s the only remedy, Sisters, and if you’ve ever tried it, I’m sure you’ll never find one that’s more efficacious. You were truly inspired, Sister, and I ask God to bless you.

“You, Sister, sitting next to her, please tell us what a Sister should do when she finds herself far away, is troubled in mind, and doesn’t know where to turn for advice.”

“I think, Monsieur, that the simplest thing is to put ourselves in the hands of God and to trust in His goodness. In addition, it seems to me that if we’re living with a Sister we trust, we can ask her permission to write to Superiors.”

“Blessed be God! Sister confirms what the other Sister just said about the peace to be found in abandoning yourself to God, and she added that it’s well to write about the matter. Now, Sisters, you should know that when you want to write to a relative, a friend, or someone else, you have to ask the Sister Servant’s permission, and, once the letter is written, to give it to her to be sent if she thinks fit, or to be retained, if she thinks it better to do so. This is done in all well-regulated Communities, and we do the same at our house. Not one of our priests or Brothers would write to anyone whomsoever without first coming to ask permission, then bringing me the letter, which I read and either send or keep, depending on the circumstances. If I’m not there, they go to the other Superiors, who do the same. ‘But that’s very hard, Monsieur. Quoi! I write something (which doesn’t happen very often) and my letters must be read, and they risk not being sent if they’re not acceptable!’ Yes, Sisters, it has to be that way; otherwise there would be no order: one would write in her own style, and someone else in another. That’s the custom in all well-regulated houses. But when it’s a question of writing to Superiors or to the Directress, then, Sisters, there’s no need to ask for permission nor to show your letters to anyone. You’re absolutely free to write to them; you should even do so whenever you feel the need, without having to ask the Sister Servant’s permission, and she must have nothing to say about it because that’s the order that has to be preserved.

“The same is true for letters that come in; when they arrive, you shouldn’t read them until the Sister Servant has first seen them, nor
should they be given or sent to the Sister to whom they’re ad-
dressed. That’s what’s done everywhere. Do you think that in our
house a letter is given to anyone but me? All letters for individuals
are first brought to me and, when I’ve read them, I give or keep
them, as I think fit. But when you get a letter from Superiors or from
the Superioress, the Sister Servant has no right to read it; she should
deliver it, sealed, the moment she receives it, and if the Sister says to
her, ‘Sister, would you like to read this?’ she mustn’t do it but say to
her, ‘I’d better not, Sister; it belongs to you, and I shouldn’t touch
it.’ ”

At this point M. Vincent was called away on some urgent busi-
ness and left M. Portail to speak in his place. “You’re really going to
be deprived, Sisters, because M. Vincent left you on such a beau-
tiful path. You had begun to taste the sweetness of his words and sud-
denly you’ve been cut off from them. You’re left with me now, and
I’m just the opposite from him. But I’m under obedience, and
maybe he’ll be able to come back to finish what he started. If he
does, you’ll be very fortunate. Meanwhile, since he has given or-
ders, we’ll say what God will inspire us on the topic that’s being dis-
cussed.

“Please tell us your thoughts, Sister.”

“Monsieur, the first reason that occurred to me for knowing how
we should act when in difficulty and at a distance from the
Motherhouse is that, if we didn’t know, we’d be in danger of dis-
pleasing God by acting contrary to what we’re supposed to do be-
cause we weren’t duly informed. This might cause us great interior
distress and keep us from being at peace with God, with our neigh-
bor, and with ourselves and, consequently, would separate us from
God, who dwells only in a place of peace.

“Secondly, we put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation be-
cause, if we don’t know how to act amid great difficulties, we’ll eas-
ily allow ourselves to go to persons who, not having the spirit of the
Motherhouse, might advise us to do the opposite of what we’re sup-
posed to do, and that would bring about our total ruin. When, on the
contrary, we’re well informed as to how to act in such circum-
stances, we’ll be preserved in the spirit of the Company wherever we may be.

“On the second point, I thought, with regard to material things, that, if we’re near the Motherhouse, it’s well to come and tell our Superiors what we think, with the intention of following their advice; and if we’re so far away that we can’t come, we should place ourselves in the presence of God and, after asking His assistance, do what His Goodness will inspire us to do and what we think is permitted by our Superiors. For spiritual matters and interior trials, however, I think we should seek consolation entirely in God, accept them cheerfully for love of Him without worrying about them, and bear with them as long as it pleases Him; and we shouldn’t appear to be in a bad mood or let our Sisters notice anything. To be in this state, I think I have to ask it earnestly of God, and that was my resolution, with the help of His holy grace.”

“Our Sister has mentioned a very compelling and remarkable motive, and we should study it a little. She says that, if we didn’t know the right thing to do, we’d put ourselves in danger of losing our vocation. Maybe that’s more serious than you think, Sisters, for you shouldn’t say to yourselves, ‘If I weren’t in that place, I’d be somewhere else, where I could work out my salvation just as well; people are saved everywhere.’ Bear in mind, Sisters, that someone who loses her vocation is like a fish out of water. A fish can’t live very long out of the water; it dies immediately. Why? Because water is its element, and it’s out of it. In the same way, the Community is the element of Daughters of Charity who are called to it. As long as they remain in it, they’re alive and have the grace to work out their salvation, but if they’re out of it, they don’t know what to do any more, and most of those who abandon their vocation are lost, if God doesn’t rescue them by a very extraordinary act of mercy. I don’t mean only those who leave from this house, but, in general, all the men and women who abandon their vocation, wherever they’ve been called, for they’re all unfaithful to God and insult Him by spurning the graces He gave them and not using them as they should.
“In connection with this, I have to tell you something, although I do so with great sorrow because it concerns a man who was one of us; but that doesn’t matter, it will help you to see how dangerous it is to lose one’s vocation. A young man from a good family, addicted to immorality and worldly vanity, was placed with us by his father, who feared his bad conduct. For nearly a year he was confined to a room, where no one saw him except a member of the house, to make him aware of his duty. He was there like a prisoner. Toward the end of the year, he was touched by God and felt a great desire not only never to return to his excesses but to do penance for them, withdraw from the world entirely, and serve God in the Congregation of the Mission. After persevering for some time in this desire, he was admitted. He did very well and everyone was edified by him. He was always to be seen performing acts of humility and seeking the things that were lowly and humble. When he made repetition of prayer, we thought we were listening to an angel. His fervor and devotion were unparalleled.

“That lasted about two years. After that he began to grow lax, then to do everything negligently and to slip back. He was ruined by the company of certain bad persons who had no great love for the Community. He left on the pretext of doing better elsewhere. He wore his cassock and still seemed to want to be a priest, but soon went back to the ways of the world. He rode about on horseback and behaved quite differently from the way a man of God should act. He was a courtier-clergyman. He slipped again, for I saw him yesterday without any ecclesiastical attire; he was dressed as a cavalry man and was about to set out for the army.

“Now, please tell me, isn’t it true that his salvation is in jeopardy? Perhaps he’ll be killed, and God knows in what condition, for he no longer has the sentiments of piety he formerly manifested. Now he talks like a freethinker and an atheist; he’s beginning to have doubts and says he doesn’t believe in much of anything. That’s the state of a man who has lost his vocation, but who once seemed like an angel.

“So, dear Sister, you were right to say that, by not knowing what we’re supposed to do, we put ourselves in danger of losing our vo-
cation; and also for remarking that this is a great misfortune, for
doubtless the greatest misfortune that could befall a person called
by God to serve Him in a certain way of life would be to abandon it.
We rarely ever fall into such a state when we continue to observe the
sound customs that the Rules and Superiors teach us. I’ve noticed
that, in the ten to twelve years I’ve had the honor of serving the
Company, most of the Sisters who have left did so because they
didn’t consult others in their difficulties. Some wanted a different
ministry, others wanted another companion. We harbor aversions
and don’t mention them. This festers in our hearts. We have trouble
with one Rule that we don’t know how to reconcile with another, for
occasionally there are Rules that contradict one another and, by
failing to seek clarification, we fall into abuses and weariness. We
go to confession and never say a word about this. Meanwhile, our
minds continue to be troubled. Should some unexpected occasion
arise, we lay down our arms. I’ve spent a little extra time on this
point because it’s very important.”

Another Sister said that it seemed to her that, when we’re de­
prived of assistance, one good means is to offer God a Holy Com­
munion that He may be pleased to consider our troubles or distress.

M. Portail questioned another Sister, who then asked two ques­
tions. The first was whether, whenever we feel upset, it might not be
advisable, before anything else, to begin by going to Holy Commu­
nion, before seeking a remedy elsewhere.

“You’re right, dear Sister,” replied M. Portail. “It’s well to begin
with that. Prayer is excellent; it’s good to kneel before a crucifix,
but it’s even better to be united with God in Holy Communion. The
other means are only accessory; this is the principal one. After that,
if the trial persists, we’ll have greater strength to endure it, and the
prayer we make will be more efficacious. If we find it hard to say
what’s bothering us, this will make it easier for us; if we’re in a
place where we have no one, God will inspire us; but, as long as
you’re at the Motherhouse, Sisters, confide in your Superioress or
in your Directress; they have the spirit of God to guide you and they
will obtain it for the Sisters they’ll give you wherever you go, and
you should look upon it as certain that you’ll never be mistaken in
following their advice. We should have greater confidence in the Superiors God has given us than in an angel from heaven because it’s through them that God tells us what He wills of us. He has said so himself: ‘Whoever hears you, hears me.’ 3 If, on the one side, you saw an angel, who was ordering you to do something, and Our Lord should tell you to do something else, you’d be obliged to ignore what the angel might say to you, in order to do what Our Lord would tell you.

“But, to benefit by what your Superiors say, dear Sisters, go to them with a right intention in order to become better, not out of spite or revenge, or to vent your anger and show resentment and aversion, or out of some kind of bravado. Sisters who would go to Superiors without the right intention, far from leaving their concerns there, would carry back additional ones. Go to them in a straightforward way, with the intention of carrying out punctually all they may tell you to do, looking on your Superior as God, listening to him and obeying him as you’d obey God. In this way you can rest assured that God will bless your compliance and give you the peace of mind you’re seeking.”

The other question was to know whether, when we’re living far away and those who have made the establishment of the house or contributed to it need our assistance, we should give it to them at the expense of our service of the poor. This was discussed in various ways. Mademoiselle cited the Rule by which we’re forbidden to serve rich persons who have the means of being served by others. M. Portail advised us to excuse ourselves courteously from doing so, alleging the danger into which poor persons might fall if they didn’t get food or medicine at the proper time. He added that, if the service requested could be rendered outside the time we serve the poor and was simply a case of assistance to the sick, such as preparing soups or medicines, we could do it, provided it happened rarely, didn’t take up much time, and didn’t do a disservice to the local surgeons.

3Cf. Lk 10:16. (NAB)
When another Sister was questioned, she replied, “The first reason for being informed of how to act when problems arise for us in distant places is so that we won’t do anything inappropriate or harmful to the Company, our neighbor, or ourselves. Another reason is that this keeps us in conformity with the spirit and line of conduct of the Company; for, if some difficulty should arise, I’d reflect before God as to what would be for His greater glory and would try to remember what I heard my Superiors say on similar topics, in order to judge from that what I could do to act in conformity with their intentions. If the matter were such that I could mention it to the Sister with whom I was living, I’d talk it over with her in the hope that God would give her His Spirit for that; if it was a matter of conscience, I’d confess whatever sin I recognized, make the resolution to give it up, and try to put my mind at rest. My resolution was to do my utmost, with the help of God, to acquire the spirit of the Company and its maxims during the time I have the happiness of being at the Motherhouse, so that I can make use of them when God permits me to be far away from it.”

“Now there’s a motive,” said M. Portail, “that hasn’t yet been mentioned, namely, uniformity. You must conform yourselves to the spirit of the Motherhouse so that you will not only be recognized by your attire and headdress but also by the way you act. You see how necessary that is, dear Sisters, so please pay close attention to it. That’s why you have to train yourselves in this. Soldiers going to war are in training before they leave, and even in peace time they still have to carry out military exercises frequently. And why do they have to do that, if not to be fully experienced when they have to go into battle? For, if they hadn’t drilled beforehand, it’s to be feared that they’d lack experience at the time they go off to war. Now, the Daughters of Charity wage war against the devil by the instructions they give the sick poor, when they go to visit them and teach them about God and the chief mysteries of our religion; this is what helps persons who are poor to think of their salvation and avoid the sins that put them in the power of the devil. They also wage war against him by teaching little girls, in whom they instill the fear of God and the desire of virtue. Above all, they wage war
against him by the good example they give by their charity in assisting their neighbor, by their modesty, their humility, and all the other virtues they practice.”

43a. - INDIFFERENCE

July 14 [1650]

“So then, Sisters, the topic of the present conference is indifference, dealing with the disposition a Daughter of Charity should have to go any place whatsoever, whether she be sent or called there, and with any Sister, and the means of keeping themselves from yielding to the weaknesses that could make them want to leave there.

“Sister, would you please tell me your thoughts on this?”

“As for the reasons we have for going any place whatsoever, I thought that it’s to obey the Will of God; to keep the promises we made on entering the Company, when we were told we’d have to go wherever we might be sent; and to imitate the Apostles, who went everywhere without any repugnance. As for the Sisters, I think we must have no preference, but accept all of them cheerfully, always putting the blame on ourselves for any difficulties that may arise.”

On the same topic, another Sister said, “The first reason we have for going where we’re sent and for accepting the Sister with whom we’ll be living is that we’re obliged to live under obedience and are assured that this is how we do God’s Will and work out our salvation. Furthermore, it’s by changing places that we imitate the life of the Apostles because, just as they went about to preach Jesus crucified, we also must go to many places and, by our good example, proclaim that there is a God for whom we’re working. As for Sister

Conference 43a. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Élisabeth Hellot.

¹This conference was recorded by Sister Élisabeth Hellot, who died between August 7, 1650, and April 13, 1651, date of the Council meeting at which her death is mentioned. There is also an allusion to a passage from a letter written by M. Nacquart on February 9, 1650, which arrived in Paris that same year. For these reasons, this conference has been placed in 1650.
companions, we should all have the same spirit, and by this means, we won’t have any difficulty being with one or the other Sister.”

“On the reasons we have for going wherever our Superiors may think fit,” remarked another Sister, “it seemed to me that we dispose ourselves for this by acquiring great charity and forbearance in order to be tolerant with those who may not be according to our spirit.”

On the same point, another Sister added that the virtue of obedience obliges us to do this, as well as the good example we should give, and our participation in the merit of the Community.

“An additional reason,” noted a Sister, “for being always disposed to go anywhere and with any Sister whomsoever is to reflect that we’ve given ourselves to God to that end, and that wherever we go we’ll find God and glorify Him, if we’re faithful to what He asks of us. A further reason is that, although we may be far from the Motherhouse and our Sisters, we’re always united with them and share in all the good done there. A third reason is that no matter which Sister we may be with, it’s God who has united us with her; consequently, it’s for our advancement. If her temperament seems incompatible with ours, we can think that God has permitted this to give us the opportunity to practice virtue, especially gentleness and patience, and that the saints would have been pleased to have similar opportunities of practicing virtue, since we know that some of them obliged themselves voluntarily to live with bad-tempered persons in order to glorify God by the submission they manifested toward them.”

When Mademoiselle was asked by Most Honored Father to say what inspirations God had given her on this subject, she replied, “As the first reason we have for being always and at all times disposed to go everywhere and with any of our Sisters, I thought that this disposition was absolutely necessary in order to be faithful to God’s plan in establishing this Company, which otherwise couldn’t give Him the glory His Goodness wills to draw from it, nor the service we owe to persons who are poor. The second reason is that by this disposition we lend credence to the truth of the attribute God gives himself, namely, that He is a jealous God, who wants our
heart entirely, and that we’re prepared without reserve to do His holy Will, made known infallibly to us by that of our Superiors. The third is that, without this disposition, a Daughter of Charity can’t truly be said to be a member of the Company, since her example alone, if it were followed, would be capable of causing great hindrances and disorders to all the others. It’s even to be feared that it might be the beginning of the total ruin of the Company.”

The second point concerned what Daughters of Charity must do to prevent themselves from yielding to those weaknesses and the flightiness that might lead them to want to be separated from their Sister.

On this point a Sister said, “I thought that what we can do to remedy those weaknesses and the flightiness that enter our minds is to place ourselves at the foot of the Cross and reflect on the sufferings of the Son of God in the difficulties that arise.”

“It seemed to me,” noted another Sister, “that the means to remedy such weakness and flightiness is to regret them as soon as we become aware of them, without dwelling on them any longer.”

“It seemed to me,” added another Sister, “that one good means of thwarting the influence of these weaknesses and flightiness is not to tell our little difficulties to laypersons because they might suggest solutions harmful to our situation, but we should rather tell them to our Superiors.”

Another Sister stated that she saw no more sovereign remedy against the harm that might be caused by these weaknesses and flightiness than a great desire to suffer, which would stifle all our repugnances and keep us from mentioning them to anyone but our Superiors.

Another Sister said that when these thoughts arise, it’s well to think that this is God’s Will, to adore this same Will, to regard as a temptation any thoughts that might persuade us to the contrary, and to ask God’s help not to give in to them.

To this Mademoiselle added, “One of the means to keep ourselves from having dispositions contrary to that is to offer ourselves frequently and unreservedly to God in our prayers and Holy Communions. Another means is, as soon as we perceive any sort of aver-
sion or dislike for the place where we’re sent or for the persons with whom we’re placed, even for our Sister—or some of our Sisters if there are several of us—is not to allow this passion to take root but to take care in the beginning to make contrary acts, to go to Communion with this intention, and, if we don’t feel that this gives us strength, to examine carefully where that might come from, to ask God’s forgiveness for it, and to be renewed by the thought of the first fervor that made us give ourselves to God. If, however, this were to continue for any length of time, we should tell our Superiors about our temptations and about ourselves, and follow exactly the advice God will allow them to give us, humbly asking Him for the grace to do it, and praying to the Blessed Virgin and our Guardian Angel for the same intention.”

After all the Sisters questioned had spoken (we haven’t mentioned all of them because several gave the same thoughts), Most Honored Father began to speak as follows: “Before anything else, Sisters, I’m going to tell you how you should give an account of your mental prayer. Those who can write should put it down on paper: the conference is on such and such a subject; the first point is such and such; the first reason that occurred to me on this was such and such; the second, this or that; and so on. After that will come the second point, which concerns the means. Mention the first means, then the second, the third, and the fourth, separating the second from the first and the third from the second, so as to make the meaning clear. I think it would be well, Sisters, to have a special conference, for which you need not prepare, in order to have to give some reasons spontaneously. Not that you haven’t, by God’s mercy, grasped the points of the present conference, dear Sisters, and chosen motives and means that are all pertinent to the topic. That’s obvious, by the grace of God. I thank Him for this with all my heart, and I ask His Divine Goodness to imprint on the heart of each one of you what has been said and what will be said at this present conference.

“Some of you have given such very good reasons, so well perceived and carefully thought out that a preacher couldn’t have done better; and that can be said of all of you. Yes, all, every single one of
you, Sisters, have given satisfactory motives and means, both those who have written and those who have spoken. We can say that God has enlightened all of you and that you have all discovered the secrets for fighting your enemy—other than those who weren’t informed on time to make their prayer on this, and that’s my fault, because I should have told you about it sooner.

“One of you said that it was the Will of God that Daughters of Charity should go wherever they’re sent, and she was certainly right. May God be pleased to bless her! It’s God’s Will that the Daughters of Charity should come and go to this parish, this village, this hospital, or any other place, without being concerned or worried about whether she’ll be with this Sister or another, for a long time or for a short time. You should have no doubt, Sisters, that this is the Will of God; and, as has been so well remarked, that it’s what He has willed for the Company from the time when, in His infinite goodness, He first brought it into existence. And, since it is the Will of God, which we know by the blessing He gives to the ministries to which He allows you to be called, why should anyone be unwilling to do it, or not want to do it gladly? For what should we be doing in this world but the most holy Will of God? As has been said, Our Lord came on earth only to do it. Mon Dieu! such a beautiful remark! May God be blessed for having given that thought to one of our Sisters, and may God bless her for having said it to us! I don’t remember who mentioned it, but, whoever she is, may God be pleased to bless her!

“So, Jesus Christ came into the world only to do the Will of His Father, and did nothing else all His life; and will a Daughter of Charity, who should model herself on Jesus Christ, want to do anything other than God’s Will? ‘But, Monsieur,’ someone will say, ‘what’s the use of doing God’s Will?’ What’s the use, Sister? If a soul in this world could see it, she wouldn’t find difficulties enough to satisfy her; she wouldn’t find anything painful enough; she wouldn’t see enough trials, so much would she want to embrace them in order to do the Will of God.

“That, dear Sisters, gives glory to God by rendering Him the submission that a creature owes its Creator and in which He finds His
joy and pleasure. Yes, Sisters, it gives joy to God and He takes His delight in it. This is a truth sanctioned by Holy Scripture; so much so, that, bearing in mind the Will of God, when you hear from the mouth of your Superior that you must go to a certain place, and you adore this same divine Will, going cheerfully wherever you’ve been told, without wondering whether you’ll be far from the Motherhouse or be separated from your relatives, whether you’ll ever see them again, if you’ll be going with a Sister for whom you have no great liking; when you surmount all that by your desire to do the Will of God, Sisters, you give joy to God, who takes His pleasure and delight in you; you give joy to the angels, who rejoice at the glory God draws from the obedience a poor creature renders to His holy Will, and you give joy to the saints, who share God’s joy. Look how far that goes, Sisters: to give joy to God, to give joy to the angels, and to give joy to the saints!

“This truth is based on Holy Scripture, which states that the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner does penance on earth. 2 And what greater penance is there than to be ready at any moment to set out and leave all to go to a place where you’ve never been, with persons you’ve never seen, leaving behind others with whom you were getting along so well! Have no doubt that the angels and saints rejoice at this.

“If God, the angels, and the saints rejoice, the devils and the damned are, on the contrary, saddened by it, as can be proven by Holy Scripture. God points you out to the devil and says, ‘Look, you miserable creature, you who were unwilling to obey me, you whom I created with so many privileges and with whom I shared my glory; look at this simple Sister, who is so courageous that she makes no account of all the difficulties she’ll have to face in order to obey me, nor of all the repugnances nature may suggest to her. Look, you miserable creature, and let this example also serve to confound you and add to your eternal punishment!’

“Don’t we see in Job the pleasure God takes in His chosen souls and how He points them out to Satan to increase his shame? 3 Do you

2 Cf. Lk 15:10. (NAB)
not see my servant Job,’ He says to him, ‘how obedient he is to my law and how he wants to please me?’

“Now, Sisters, if the demons suffer additional torment from this, so do lost souls. What reproaches would God not address to a Sister from the Charity if, because she was unfaithful to her vocation, she was enduring the pains of purgatory, and perhaps even those of hell, to satisfy the divine justice! May His Goodness not permit that! But if such a disaster did befall some of them, have no doubt that God would make known to those souls the good that you’re doing, Sisters. He says to them interiorly, ‘If you had not moved from there, if you had been faithful to your vocation, you would now be as pleasing to God as certain Sisters, who came long after you. They would be your daughters. Look at them, some here, some there; each glorifying God in the way of life established for her, this one in a parish, that one in the country, another in a hospital, yet another with the foundlings; and you, unfortunate woman, will be here for all eternity because you didn’t follow the impulses God was giving you to do similar works! Ah! you unfortunate soul!’ Your submission to the Will of God, Sisters, adds to the pain of these souls who suffer in punishment of their infidelities.

“Don’t we see that those who have left your Company are languishing? They’re withering where they stand, Sisters, withering; I know that for a fact. God allows them to hear of the good which, by His mercy, is being done, and which they now see in another light than when they were listening to the temptation suggesting that they leave. That’s why they make incredible efforts to return. They use the influence of Monsieur X, Madame X, Father X, and anyone else they can find among their acquaintances. They’re always secretly asking about what’s going on at the Motherhouse and for news of Sisters they knew; they ask for the whereabouts of this Sister and that, and they hear that this one is in Nantes, another in Angers, another in Nanteuil, and then they say to themselves, ‘Alas! if I were still there, maybe I’d be in Angers, maybe in Nantes, maybe in Nanteuil.’ And what you’re doing causes them remorse, which tyr-

\[\text{Cf. Jb 1:8. (NAB)}\]
annizes them and gnaws at them with displeasure. I know some who have neither property nor joy, and most of them are like that. Those who don’t experience these sufferings are certainly in danger of being insensitive to the impulses of grace.

“This should really encourage you, dear Sisters, to cherish the dispositions God has given you because, by the grace of God, I don’t know if it has ever happened that a single one of you has refused to go where you were sent. No, I don’t know of any. By the mercy of God, it has never come to my knowledge that a single one of you has been guilty of refusing to obey. What we’re saying is only by way of precaution and to point out to you how important it is for you to continue in the same dispositions God gave you from the beginning. And, as has been noted, it’s to be feared that it would be the beginning of the ruin of your Company. And why? Because it was clear from the start, Sisters, that God wanted this of you, because He wants to be glorified by it and because the neighbor is helped by it.

“And how could you render to poor persons the service that, by the mercy of God, you do render them, if you never left a place! Who would go to those poor convicts? Who would nurse the sick in those villages? Who would visit those persons living in rooms and attics with no assistance? Doesn’t the blessing given by God to these ministries make it clear how pleased He is with them? What would happen if a Sister should refuse to obey? By the grace of God, I don’t think that has ever happened, but nothing can more surely draw down the wrath of God upon you.

“If someone were to say, ‘But where’s this place I’m going to? I don’t know anyone; they’ll laugh at me,’ the same thing would happen to her as happened to Jonah. ‘Go to Nineveh,’ the Most High said to him, ‘and tell the people to do penance, or in three days Nineveh will be destroyed.’ Jonah began to think to himself, ‘There’s a King in that place who may have me maltreated; I won’t be welcome if I go there to preach penance; I might even lose my life.’ What does he do? He boards a ship to go elsewhere. Immediately the weather turns bad and a storm arises. To lighten the ship, the sailors decide to throw Jonah into the sea. A whale swallows him up, and holds him for three days, then spews him out alive. At
that moment, Sisters, Jonah fully realized his disobedience, asked God’s forgiveness for it with the greatest sorrow, and, filled with fire and faith, went off to preach in Nineveh.4

“You can judge from the example of this prophet, Sisters, how angry God is with souls He has chosen to carry out His works, when they fail to obey. But who could hope for the grace He gave Jonah to get up after his fall? Alas, Sisters, don’t expect it, for it’s greatly to be feared that those as unfortunate as Jonah may, like him, fall to the bottom of the sea, into the belly of a whale—I mean, into sin and the incapacity to escape from it except by a remarkable miracle. And God doesn’t do that every day. May the Goodness of God be pleased to preserve us from these faults!

“I know that people more than six hundred leagues away are asking for you, Sisters; I’ve had letters from them; yes, people more than six hundred leagues away are thinking of you; and if Queens5 are requesting you there, I know other persons who are also asking for you overseas.6 What a high opinion those Queens and those other persons must have of you, Sisters, to call for you from such a distance! This is another fresh obligation for you to work at your perfection and, above all, to acquire that detachment with which you must go.

“It seems to me, however, that I see you already sufficiently convinced by all the aforesaid reasons, dear Sisters, in view of the most holy Will of God, in view of holy obedience, in view of the example Jesus Christ, who was obedient even to death on the Cross, has given you. He could have had millions of angels to defend Him against the rage of His enemies, He could have finished them on His own, since you see that He overturned them with a single word; yet, Sisters, He’s unwilling to use this power, so greatly does He love to obey the most holy Will of His Father, and He’s more content to die

--- 409 ---

4Cf. Jon 1:4. (NAB)
5Despite her attachment to the Jansenist party, Louise-Marie de Gonzague, a former Lady of Charity, wife of King Wladyslaw IV, then of his brother, Jan Casimir, held Saint Vincent in the highest esteem. She summoned to Poland the Priests of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the Visitation Nuns, gave them housing, took care that nothing was wanting to them, and never failed to protect them. She died in 1667.
6The missionaries in Madagascar.
on the Cross to satisfy the good pleasure of God than if everything had come to His defense.

“I seem to read in your hearts the desire to imitate Him, Sisters. ‘But will I be going six hundred leagues away from here? Will I be going overseas?’ I see clearly, dear Sisters, that you’re willing to go when obedience calls and that, even if you knew you’d never return, you wouldn’t want to delay for even a moment. And I’m sure that not a single one of you hasn’t already made this act of resignation in her heart. There is even some who have already done it more than six times. Yes, by the grace of God, I see all of you well disposed to do whatever it will please the Divine Goodness to ask of you, and I seem to hear you say, ‘Yes, my Lord Jesus Christ, with all the affection of my heart, with all the strength of my soul, I give myself entirely to You to live and to die in obedience as You willed to live and die by obeying, whether I’m sent to this place or that, or called back here to be sent somewhere else. It will be all the same to me, my God, whether for a short time or a long time, whether to live there or die there. I’m content with whatever You permit, and I won’t worry about what could happen, provided it pleases you, my God, to grant me the grace of obeying all my life for love of You.’

“The resolution all of you are now making, dear Sisters, I am also making, and I firmly hope that God in His goodness will grant me the grace to render to my Superiors the obedience I owe them. I firmly hope for this, please God. Wretched man that I am, I have good reason to regret having failed in it. Eh bien! blessed be God!

“What we have to do now, Sisters, is to find some means of making sure that these weaknesses and thoughtlessness, which can come even to the most virtuous persons, don’t prompt you to want to be separated from the Sister with whom God has permitted you to reside, on the pretext that the two of you don’t get along very well, or that she’s not exact in following her Rules, or that you want to ask to be changed because you’re not happy there (because of some Lady or some confessor!). Mon Dieu! Sisters, pay no attention to that, for it would trouble your peace of mind. Oh no! never listen to that!
“So, Sisters, I won’t try to find any means other than the ones you yourselves have given, because, by God’s grace, I see none that are more effective. The first is to ask earnestly for the grace of God, for who could promise herself to advance a single step on the path of virtue, Sisters, if God doesn’t place us on it first and guide us on the way? That’s a truth guaranteed by the Gospel. ‘No one,’ says Our Lord, ‘comes to me, if my Father does not draw him.’ Now, to obtain this grace from the Goodness of God, Sisters, it’s only right that we should ask for it. So this will be one of the principal means you’ll use; and, if you take my word, you won’t miss a day without doing it. Ask for it earnestly; ask for it insistently; ask for it humbly; and, above all, ask for it with a great desire to obtain it, recognizing and admitting that without it you’ll never take a step on the path of virtue. We delude and deceive ourselves if we think we can do anything on our own. Experience teaches us this only too well. We feel nature complaining, we feel a repugnance for this, an aversion for that, and sometimes a distaste for everything. Alas! if God didn’t come to our rescue, what would we do! So, Sisters, I can’t recommend this practice enough to you. But I hope that, since God has led you to understand how helpful it is, He’ll give you the grace to adopt it.

“Another means—which you’ve also mentioned—is to believe that we’re the ones at fault in the little confrontations that sometimes trouble our hearts. If you’re dissatisfied with your Sister, think about your own conduct: ‘But isn’t it I who have given her reason for being in this mood?’ Put yourself in her place and take a good look. If someone answered me as rudely as I answered her, wouldn’t I resent it? Believe me, Sisters, God is the one who has led you to discover that this is one of the most effective means for preserving charity among yourselves because, if you consider your neighbor in the same light as you would like to be considered, you’ll never think that she’s wrong; on the contrary, she’ll always seem to you to be right.

7Cf. Jn 6:44, (NAB)
“‘But what should be done when the person is so annoying that everything we do annoys her, Monsieur?’ Sister, in the first place see whether or not you’ve given her cause to be annoyed, and whether you haven’t given her reason to be more annoyed with you than you are with her, and say, ‘Alas! this Sister must be very good since Our Lord is trying her in this way; no doubt He wants to sanctify her by patience.’ But don’t ever say, ‘This Sister is annoying; she’s so discontented! Nothing I can do pleases her,’ because, first of all, you’ll destroy charity between you, for there’s nothing that cools it so much as contemptuous expressions.

“In the places where you are, you won’t produce the good results God wants you to bring about there, for, from the moment you no longer have the spirit of charity, there is no more question of good works. You’ll lose your reputation of being Daughters of God, for charity is nothing other than God, and whoever says Daughters of Charity says daughters of God. What would the people who are expecting help from you say, and what would the Queens who are waiting for you say, if they no longer saw in you the spirit of God? So, preserve this spirit of God, Sisters, this spirit of charity and mutual support, which will always cause you to take the blame for everything and not put it on your Sister. Love one another with a heartfelt love and, since all of you are of only one mind, then be all of one heart as well. I’m not saying that you’re to love one another with that sensual love that consists in I don’t know what sort of satisfaction, Sisters; I don’t mean with that evil love with which the wicked love the wicked, but with the love God wants us to have for one another and has its principle in Him.

‘Feeling a certain natural repugnance at going far away or being with one person rather than another, Sisters, doesn’t mean that you don’t have the right disposition, provided it’s only in your feeling but you don’t consent to it and, as soon as you do feel it, that you go for the remedy, that is, to the foot of the Cross, to address your complaint lovingly to Our Lord, saying, ‘My God, You see how weak I am and how powerless to control myself and my passions. Please help me not to do anything contrary to Your Will; give me the strength, my God, not to give in.’
“Be very careful, Sisters, not to let your Sister see that you’re upset with her. Always live in peace. If, however, things don’t calm down, Sisters, you can tell your troubles to your Superiors, but with submission, ready to do whatever they tell you, as coming from God. You can say to them, ‘I find it hard to go to such a place or to do such a thing; nevertheless, I’ll still go, if you think fit.’ And let me tell you, Sisters, allow yourselves to be guided. You’ll experience the blessings God gives to submission. But if that should last for a month or two—even three or four—you shouldn’t be upset by it, provided God and your Superiors are aware of it, for souls accept orders in diverse ways: some joyfully, others indifferently, and others with great difficulty. The ones who accept them with great joy are filled with the Spirit of God; they welcome difficulties and take their delight in them. These are gentle souls to whom God has given, together with His Spirit, fullness of peace, as a reward for the difficulties they’ve previously overcome. These souls, I repeat, dear Sisters, instead of experiencing any repugnance, are filled with consolation in the most trying circumstances, and rejoice to accept the most difficult proposals made to them. Lack of comfort, remoteness, any sort of companionship—and death itself, if it should come to them—are all the same to them in the sight of God because they are filled with God.

“Other souls also receive with pleasure the news that they are being sent to far off places, but from a motive quite contrary to that of the former, for it’s because they’ll be far removed from someone they dislike, or because they’ll have greater freedom than at the Motherhouse, or because people will have a high opinion of them, talk about them and say, ‘That Sister has gone to such and such a place, to such and such a house. They must really appreciate her!’ Let’s be on our guard against this dangerous poison, Sisters, and strenuously reject these pernicious thoughts that would ruin all of us.

“Fifteen or sixteen years ago a great nobleman of the court was condemned to be beheaded. A holy person was chosen to assist him to die. This person was Fr. de Condren, General of the Oratorians,
a man who had the spirit of God. He was told that this nobleman was
the most resolute, the best prepared to die, the most generous, and
the bravest man alive, and that he was going to his death as cheer­
fully as to battle. Now, this holy man who had vast experience and
excellent judgment, was afraid that the nobleman was acting that
way for the wrong reason, namely, vanity, so that he wouldn’t ap­
pear to be a coward in his passage from this life, and to have people
speak of his courage after his death. He went to see him and, finding
him so determined, began to assail him with the fear of death. ‘Do
you realize, Monsieur,’ he said to him, ‘that you’re going to die in
two hours and that you’ll have to appear before God and give an
account of the many souls you’ve sent to hell? Fifteen or twenty men,
whom you’ve slain in duels, and most of whom died without con­
fession, are crying out to God for justice. And how do you know
whether you’ll be eternally damned with them? It’s God you’re
dealing with, Monsieur; think carefully about that; very little time
remains; you must spend it well.’

“These words and a few others that this good priest addressed to
the unfortunate nobleman gripped him with fear. He was discon­
certed and no longer knew what to do. He was heartily sorry for the
evil he had done. He feared the judgment of God, and when that
holy man saw him in this state, he shored up his courage with the
following words: ‘It’s true that you can’t be too sorry for the evil
you’ve done, Monsieur, but I assure you on the part of God that, if
you really and truly repent, if you accept death in satisfaction for

of Langres in 1619 and that of Saint-Magloire in 1620; then he established a house of his
Congregation in Poitiers, where he remained for over a year. On his return to Paris, he made a
fine reputation for himself as a director of souls, which attracted to him Olier, Meyster, Amelote,
Gaston, Duc d’Orleans and brother of the King, and other eminent persons of rank. He governed
the Oratory from October 30, 1629, to January 7, 1641, the day of his death. (Cf. Denis Amelote,
La vie du P. Charles de Condren [Paris, H. Sara. 1643].) Saint Vincent held him in high esteem.
“He spoke to me about him in terms that might seem unbelievable,” writes Jean-Jacques Olier
(cf. Mémoires autographes, vol. II, p. 225), “and I remember that he said to me concerning him,
‘There has not been found a man like him, non est inventus similis illi;’ and a thousand other
similar things, going even so far as to fall on his knees and strike his breast when he learned of his
death, and to accuse himself, with tears in his eyes, of not having honored the holy man as much
as he deserved.”
your sins, they will be forgiven.' So, he was reassured and full of confidence. The good priest then made him acknowledge that his courage was due to vanity alone and a desire to acquire a reputation.

"Now, God forbid, Sisters, that you should act from such a motive! I hope that God in His goodness will preserve you from that. I entreat Him to do so with all my heart, and also to deign to give us the dispositions necessary for the accomplishment of His holy Will for our entire lives, in every place and with anyone whomsoever. I ask that, in His infinite mercy, He will deign to forgive all of us the faults we've committed against holy obedience and to accept the resolution we're taking to live and die under obedience for love of Him. I make the same resolution for myself and, with the grace of God, I hope to be faithful to it, obeying my Superiors meticulously. This is the resolution you are now making, Sisters, and I pray with all my heart that God may graciously accept it. With this confidence, I will now pronounce the words of blessing on you. At the same time I'm pronouncing them, may God be pleased to send you the strength of His Spirit by the power of His word!

"Benedictio Dei Patris. . . ."

---

44. - OBEDIENCE

August 7, 1650

"Sisters, the subject of this conference is obedience. The first point deals with the reasons we have for this obedience; the second, the conditions necessary for true obedience, and the third, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions. So that's the subject, Sisters: holy obedience; a great virtue and a great topic for us to discuss; a great, great virtue! Please tell us your thoughts on it, Sister."

---

Conference 44. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Elisabeth Hellot.
After the Sister had spoken, Most Honored Father said to her, “So, Sister, you’re determined to acquire the virtue of obedience! That’s very fine indeed! May God be ever blessed and praised!”

“And you, Sister?”

“On the first point, the reasons why we should have the virtue of obedience, I thought in the first place that it was to please God; second, to imitate His Son who gave us the example while He was on earth. And since He had no other intention than to please God, we must do the same in all our works.

“On the second point, the conditions for true obedience, I thought that the first one was to obey of our own free will and not out of constraint; and simply, without asking why we are being ordered to do such or such a thing.

“On the third point, the means of acquiring this obedience with all its conditions, I thought it was necessary to obey humbly, without any argument, and perseveringly, without asking questions. I have resolved, therefore, to submit to whatever it pleases God to have my Superiors order me to do.”

Another Sister recalled the example of Jesus Christ in the matter of voluntary obedience and added that this virtue should be blind.

“And you, Sister,” said our worthy Father, turning to another Sister, “please tell me why Daughters of Charity should work at acquiring the virtue of obedience.”

“Because nuns have cloisters, Monsieur, but we don’t; and if obedience didn’t restrain us, we’d be in danger of committing many faults.”

“Mon Dieu! that’s well said! That’s very well said, indeed! So, Sister, do you think obedience should restrain you as much as cloisters restrain nuns?” The Sister answered that she did, adding that, even though we’re not enclosed, we’re no less obliged to be obedient than nuns.

“In that way, Sisters, obedience serves you as walls. How beautiful that is! A Sister will nurse sick persons in a parish. If she were her own mistress, she’d have no problem going now to this place, now to another, to the home of a Lady she knows or to a relative, or of lingering longer than her work requires in places where she is
called to minister. Holy obedience keeps her from all that; she goes simply where the work demands, and wastes no time in useless visits. Isn’t that what you mean, Sister, when you say that nuns have cloisters but Daughters of Charity have only obedience? Do you think that a Daughter of Charity who observes obedience exactly does just as well as a nun in her cloister?"

The Sister said yes, and M. Vincent went on, "Yes, Sisters, you can be certain of that. If there’s anything beautiful to see, anything that’s pleasing to God, and admirable in the eyes of angels and humans; if there’s a phenomenon worthy of amazement, it’s to see Sisters living on their own in a room, who seem, in the judgment of those who don’t know them, to be doing as they please, but in reality are so submissive that it may be said that they never do their own will because they do nothing except by holy obedience. No, dear Sisters, you can rest assured that nuns, confined their entire lives within their cloisters, do no more than you, if you’re obedient, and that what you do by this virtue is so great that it would be hard to find anything greater.

“What means should you use to acquire this virtue of obedience, Sister?” When the Sister had answered that we should obey Superiors as we would God, Most Honored Father continued, “So then, Sister, you think that when a Sister says something to us it’s God who is saying it to us through her?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“And if it’s the Sister Servant who gives the order, and we find it hard to obey, thinking that it would be done better in some other way, should we refrain from obeying?”

“No,” said the Sister.

“But if the Sister Servant is younger and a more recent arrival than you, wouldn’t it be better to follow the knowledge and experience you have than to do what she advises?” To this the Sister replied that she felt it was more meritorious to listen to the Sister Servant.

“You’re quite right, Sister! and you need have no doubt about it; take my word that what God orders you by your Superiors for love of Him will never fail to be for His greater glory.
“And you, Sister, do you think it’s necessary for a Daughter of Charity to be obedient?”
“Yes, it is.”
“Why do you think so, Sister?”
“Because the Son of God has given us the example.”
“When did He do that, Sister?”
“When He came on earth.”
“And how long did He obey?”
“Until His death.”
“You said it well. Yes, He obeyed even to death, and to death on the Cross, which wasn’t a common, ordinary form of death, but the most painful and ignominious of all. For what other reason do you think a Daughter of Charity should obey?”
“Because God orders it.”
“That’s an excellent reason; God has ordered that we obey, and if anyone should do what God has ordered it’s the Daughters of Charity.

To understand clearly the importance of obeying, Sisters, you have to consider that two kinds of merit are entailed in obeying. The first is the merit of the work you’re doing, which is good in itself; the second is the merit of the obedience with which you do the work. For example, you serve the sick, which is a good work and very meritorious in itself. If you weren’t obliged to do it through obedience, you’d have only the merit of the work; if you serve them through obedience, you have double merit: that of the work and that of obedience. If possible, we should always desire to act through obedience. Imagine, Sisters, that for works done through obedience, the same holds true as for a picture that may be worth ten écus for what it is in itself, but because it’s from the hand of a great master, such as Michelangelo, or some other highly-respected artist, its value doubles; and, instead of the ten écus it would be worth, it’s now worth twenty. These works are also like the vestments used at Mass; you see beautiful linen, gleaming white, carefully folded, with a pleasing scent. That’s lovely. But because this linen is to be used at Holy Mass, it’s of far greater value. So, if we do a work that’s good in itself we merit from the goodness of the work, but if
we do it out of obedience, we have double merit. Actions indifferent in themselves, having no value of their own, are made meritorious by obedience. If a Sister knew the real meaning of obedience she’d never do anything until after she had asked the Sister Servant: ‘Sister, would you like me to do this?’ I’m speaking not only of matters of importance but of others as well. The Sister Servant herself should never do anything until she has consulted her companion: ‘Sister, do you think it would be a good idea for us to do this?’

“That’s how you should act with one another, dear Sisters; and, by the mercy of God, I think you do; for, no doubt the Sister never undertakes anything without permission of the Sister Servant, and the latter is very careful never to order her Sister to do anything by saying, for instance, ‘Go there; do that.’ O Jesus! don’t do that, for that would be to speak like mistresses to their servants. But when she has something to ask, she should say, ‘Sister, would you kindly do this?’ Never any categorical command. Please remember that, Sisters, and speak to one another only gently and graciously.

“Can you tell us, Sister, why Daughters of Charity should practice obedience?” The Sister replied that a Community couldn’t subsist without obedience. “What a good reason, Sisters! A Community couldn’t subsist if obedience weren’t observed in it, says our Sister. How true that is! Alas! what desolation would there be? You can’t imagine. Each one would start giving orders, and not a single one would take the trouble to obey. To understand this, picture to yourself what would happen to a body whose arms and feet, the members best fitted for action, were unwilling to be attached to it. Nothing would be more ridiculous; they’d leave the body crippled, and they themselves would perhaps hasten their own decay because, detached from the body, they’d be fit for nothing but to be buried in the ground. It would be the same for a Community where obedience wouldn’t be observed. The Superioress who lacked the virtue of obedience to the point or in the manner required, and the Sisters who wouldn’t practice it, would dismember one another. Good-bye to the poor Community where there’s no obedience; nothing can be maintained. That’s why our Sister was perfectly cor-
rather truly inspired—because, without doubt, it was God who has suggested to you what you are saying.

“And for what further reason do you think it’s well to obey, Sister?”

“To imitate the Son of God.”

“To what point did He obey, Sister?”

“Unto death.”

“So, Sister, you think that those who wish to follow Him should obey unto death?”

“Yes, Father.”

“For young people, there’s nothing better; but can’t an older Sister be dispensed from obedience? Isn’t it enough that she obeyed when she was a Sister companion? Now that she’s a Sister Servant, is she still subject to it?”

“Yes, she is,” replied the Sister.

“And shouldn’t an older Sister who finds herself living with someone younger and less experienced than herself think that she should be the Sister Servant?” The answer was in the negative, and Most Honored Father went on, “Oh no, dear Sisters! just because you’re old don’t think that it’s ever permissible to make any claims. Never, Sisters, never; please put that out of your minds; never claim anything on account of seniority. Quoi! because you’re older and have been in the Company a long time; because you know more about what should be done in hospitals, parishes, and in the country, you should be dispensed from holy obedience and from a more exact observance of the virtues? No, Sisters! that would be an abuse. Instead of giving greater example of virtue to others, the older Sisters would be a source of disedification.

“Tell me, Sister, do you think a Sister should be just as obedient in sickness as in health? Yes, she should, Sisters; and don’t think there’s any time when she may be dispensed from obeying. And should she obey the physician?”

“Yes,” said the Sister.

“Yes, Sister, she must obey the physician, and in everything, not picking and choosing among the remedies prescribed for her, or taking those she likes and refusing those she finds repugnant. But if
the Sister Servant is ill and another Sister tells her how she should care for herself. Does she have to obey, if she herself judges it advisable to act differently? I remember meeting a Counselor, who never did anything without consulting his footman. If he wanted to go somewhere, he’d call him and say, ‘Come here, brother; do you think we should go to such a place or do such a thing?’ Sometimes the young man didn’t know what to reply and would say, ‘I don’t know, Monsieur,’ but the other would say, ‘I want you to answer me yes or no.’ Then the footman would give his opinion, and the master would follow it. I have no doubt that this man was doing the Will of God by doing the will of his footman for the love of God, and he had the merit of obedience to the divine virtue that divinizes people. It’s a light that sheds its brightness on the souls disposed to receive it and dazzles by its splendor the eyes of those who see it and who begin immediately to admire its beauty.

“If you give yourselves once and for all to the practice of this virtue, Sisters, you’ll be more resplendent than the sun of suns; the same will hold true of your Company, as of pictures of the saints, represented in a brilliant light, like sunbeams. That’s delightful, and even before you stop to consider what this is, you’ve already said to yourself that there’s something so beautiful that they were quite enchanted with it and made greater efforts to acquire it than we might do to acquire the Christian virtues. It was the only moral virtue known in ancient times, and it comes to say that you’re servants of God, so true is it that virtue comes to the fore wherever it is. And not only Christians but even pagans thought it so beautiful that they were quite enchanted with it and made greater efforts to acquire it than we might do to acquire the Christian virtues. It was the only moral virtue they knew of at the time.”

Let’s not have less admiration for it than the pagans did. So, dear Sisters, let’s give ourselves to God, today, tomorrow and beginning right now. Let’s give ourselves to God, I say, not tomorrow but beginning right now. And let’s give ourselves, I repeat, with all our heart, to work earnestly to acquire this beautiful, amiable virtue, so well loved by Our Lord Jesus Christ.
"You made a very good remark, Sister, in saying that a Community would go to rack and ruin without obedience. Nothing is more true, and we've already said so just now. Moreover, there isn't a single well-regulated Community in which it isn't strictly observed. This applies not only to religious Communities but also to the army. Should a captain command a soldier to be the first to mount the breach, to act as a lookout over a passage where he runs a great risk of encountering the enemy and of being the weaker party, he'll never refuse. No matter what man in his company the captain orders to do this, he'll be obeyed immediately. No soldier has yet been known to refuse, although frequently the danger may have been obvious. No, not a single one has ever refused. That's admirable. I sometimes ask them, 'But when you see inevitable danger, don't you give some good reasons for not going?' 'Oh no, Monsieur!' they tell me, 'that has never happened.' If disobedience were to creep into the army, then good-bye to all the rest of order in warfare; it would no longer exist. The same would happen to Companies committed to God's service, Sisters; if obedience is absent, then good-bye to all order; that's the end of it.

"Now, tell me, Sister, what is the virtue of obedience?"

"It's doing what we're ordered to do."

"It certainly is that, Sister, but when you're asked what is the virtue of obedience, you should say that it's a virtue by which we submit our judgment and will to the judgment and will of our Superior to approve and carry out whatever he may think fitting to order us to do, without finding any fault in it. If a feast day occurs, which a Sister in a parish did not foresee, may she go to Communion, even though she hasn't asked permission?" The Sister didn't know what to reply. "Oh no, Sister! she mustn't do it; you must never receive Communion without permission.

"A Sister obeys willingly, but only when given orders by Made­moiselle or someone she likes but not by her Sister Servant; is she obedient, Sister? Oh no, definitely not, because true obedience makes no exception of persons.

"And would the Sister who obeys in something that pleases her, but not in something that doesn't, have the virtue of obedience? No,
she wouldn’t be obeying either and would have no merit. But if, in order not to contradict her Superioress or to fail in the respect due to her, a Sister showed that she was ready to do what was asked of her but didn’t do it, would she be disobedient? Yes, dear Sisters, she’d be disobedient, and in a way very harmful to the Company, letting it be seen that she prefers her own judgment to that of the Superioress. And supposing the Superioress ordered something that might be a sin, should she do it? No, she shouldn’t, Sister, because our Superiors can’t oblige us to do anything sinful.

“Supposing what she ordered was contrary to the Rule, what should be done?”

“I think it should be pointed out to her, Monsieur, and, if she persisted, her order should be carried out.”

“That’s very well thought out, Sister, for sometimes Superiors alter certain circumstances for good reasons, without, however, changing the matter completely; in such a case, because of the zeal each of you should have for the observance of Rule, it’s a good idea to point out humbly and quite simply that the order seems contrary to the Rule on that point. Then, it’s up to the Superioress to see if the thing is necessary. We must be extremely cautious on this point. There are two kinds of obedience: one to the Rules and the other to Superiors. Obedience to the Rule should always take first place and be preferred; if Superiors were to give an order directly contrary to the Rules, they shouldn’t be obeyed and would be blameworthy. Each of you must be exact to this obedience and not allow any delay. If the bell rings for an exercise, leave everything. Our progress in the spiritual life depends on this obedience to Rule. Obedience to Superiors must be so faithful and entire that, if we knew for certain that, by doing the contrary of what they said, things would go better and they themselves wouldn’t disapprove, such thoughts should still be rejected; they’re diabolical and are prompted by the spirit of pride and presumption.

“So, Sister, how many kinds of obedience are there?”

“There are two; one to the Rules and the other to Superiors.”

“Well now, Sister, a Sister who goes to Mass after asking permission has double merit: the merit of assisting at the Holy Sacri-
Office of the Mass—the most excellent work in Christendom—and that of obedience, habitual obedience to the Rule that ordains it, and actual obedience to the Superioress of whom she has asked the permission.

“And whom does a Sister obey when she kneels down before leaving the house?”

“She obeys the Rule.”

“And if she didn’t obey it, would she sin?”

“No, Monsieur, but she’d deprive herself of the merit of obedience.”

“So then, Sister, you think it’s meritorious to obey?”

“Yes, I do, Monsieur.”

“Yes, it is, Sisters, and it’s such that if you and I appreciated it properly we’d never, in the entire course of our lives, want to perform any action, however unimportant it might seem, except from obedience. You have this in your power, Sisters. And what a degree of virtue you can attain if you devote yourselves wholeheartedly to practice it! I tell you, Sisters, as long as the Company continues in the way God has given it the grace to begin, no nun on earth will do better than you. Each and every one of you can give more glory to God and greater service to your neighbor and work harder at your own perfection than any nun on earth.

“Please tell us the thoughts with which God graciously inspired you, Sister.”

“The first reason I saw is that, when we enter the Company, we place ourselves voluntarily under the guidance of a Superioress; from then on we’re obliged to live under obedience. A second reason is that it’s impossible to remain in the Company without this virtue; we’d gradually begin to grow lax in our exercises, find the orders of our Superiors wearisome, and be a source of scandal to all our Sisters. Superiors would then be forced to send us away, or we ourselves would be prompted to withdraw, for we’d no longer be able to endure our own failings, imagining that everyone was watching us, that we were a burden to them, and a thousand similar thoughts. In the end we’d have to give up everything. Another reason is that, since we have no other model in the Company than the
Son of God, we're obliged to work at acquiring the virtues that were most resplendent in His life, and obedience holds the first place among all of them because He began to obey from the time of His Incarnation until His death on the Cross.

"On the second point, the conditions of true obedience, I thought that it must be humble, patient, prompt, joyous, and persevering and that we should have the same will and judgment as those who give us orders, and equally towards all of them, without considering to whom we're submitting, recognizing the right of everyone to command us.

"On the third point, the means of acquiring this virtue with all its conditions, the first is to ask it often of God; the second, always to see God in the person of those to whom we're subject; the third, to set ourselves the task of acquiring this virtue until God gives us the grace to do so; to make frequent interior acts of submission of our judgment and will and, beginning in the morning, to foresee occasions of doing so; to make our particular examination of conscience on it and to impose some penance on ourselves when we fail; and to renew our resolutions with confidence in God. I recognized how greatly I need this virtue. That's why I resolved, with the grace of God, to use these means. Nevertheless, I've been so remiss that, since the day I made that resolution, I failed again in obedience on an occasion that presented itself. For this I very humbly ask pardon of you, Father, and of Mademoiselle and all our Sisters."

"Get up, Sister, Get up. Blessed be God and blessed be the thoughts He has given you and the resolutions He has led you to make! You said very rightly, Sister, that it would be impossible to remain in the Company without obedience. That has already been mentioned several times, but it seems to me that we can't ponder it enough.

"And you, Sister, please tell us what was the most resplendent virtue in the Son of God."

"I think it was obedience, Father."

"Yes, Sister, holy obedience. He had all the virtues to a sovereign degree, but He loved obedience above all."
“Whom should we obey, Sister? Whom should Daughters of Charity obey?”

“It seems to me, Monsieur, that they should obey God first of all, then their Rules, Superiors, and the Lady Officers in the parishes where they are.”

“That’s well stated. You see, Sisters, the Ladies have to be obeyed in whatever concerns the service of the sick, provided they don’t tell you to do anything contrary to your Rules. You owe them that, with all respect and submission. They’re the ones who employ you and give you the means of rendering the service you render to God. If they ask you to do something forbidden by your Rules, then you must excuse yourselves frankly and in such a way as not to vex them; I’m sure they won’t be annoyed, if you speak to them humbly and gently.

“And when a parish Sister wants to go to Communion but doesn’t have permission, what should she do, Sister?”

“I think she must refrain from going, as has been said, Father.”

“Yes, Sister, never go to Communion without permission. No doubt, when you live far away, you can’t come to ask for it each time, but you have to get instructions beforehand for the whole time you’re away. If some feast of special devotion occurs, on which you know the Community doesn’t receive Communion, then you mustn’t do so either. With us, if a priest recited an Office different from the one ordered by the Church, that would be wrong. If a person is attached to reciting the Office of a certain saint, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Holy Cross, etc., it doesn’t matter, he must submit to what the Church orders and not change it in any way whatsoever. Neither is it allowed to add something to the Office. I’m telling you this, Sisters, to help you to understand how important it is always to conform to what the Community is doing.

“There would be nothing more beautiful in the world, Sister, than the Company of the Daughters of Charity, if it were so uniform that, no matter where it was established, nothing would be done that was not in conformity with what is practiced in this house, and obedience was in effect everywhere, with the Sister Servant being the first to obey, to ask advice, and to submit to others. No, take my
word for it, Sisters, I don’t think there’s anything in the world more beautiful and more edifying.

“And you, Sister, will you tell us some of your thoughts?”

“On the first point, Father, I thought that the primary reason for acquiring the virtue of obedience is that the first man lost all the other virtues by the sin of disobedience, and that all Christians are obliged to practice this virtue in order to be saved. This is clear from the fact that God has given us commandments which must be obeyed if we don’t want to be damned. The second reason is that Our Lord has given us the example, for He came on earth, accomplished our redemption, and appeased the anger of God by His obedience. The third is that, besides the obedience God wills from all Christians, He asks for a more definite, particular obedience from those He has called to serve Him, without which we couldn’t be saved. A fourth is that, in our state of life, we could have no interior peace without obedience.”

“Our Sister has mentioned two powerful reasons, Sisters; and I’m going to repeat them so that they’ll remain in your minds. One is that the Son of God appeased the wrath of God His Father by obedience, and by this means accomplished the work of our salvation. *Mon Dieu!* that’s beautiful, and who can refuse to obey if she reflects on these truths? The other compelling reason, in addition to the ones our Sister gave, is that a Sister who wasn’t obedient wouldn’t have interior peace. No, Sisters, she’d never have it; there’s never peace where there’s no obedience, so don’t expect it; there’s continual unrest, making people anxious and unbearable to themselves. Please continue, Sister.”

“On the second point, the principal condition necessary for true obedience is submission of the judgment and the will; the second is perseverance, in imitation of the Son of God, who was obedient unto death on the Cross. The first means of acquiring this virtue is to ask it earnestly from Jesus Christ—the kind He himself had, both in regard to God His Father in all that concerned our salvation, and His holy Mother and Saint Joseph in what concerned the conduct of His life while He was subject to them. The second means is to practice it
on all occasions that arise, for nothing makes it easier than to make frequent acts of it.”

“That’s the only way, Sisters: to ask Jesus Christ for this virtue. That’s its source. Never, never, Sisters, will you obtain obedience except in that way. But what do you mean by acts, Sister? A little while ago someone said that we should make interior acts. Is that what you mean, or do you want to speak of the works themselves?” The Sister replied that interior acts were the desire to practice the virtue when we have the opportunity, and that by acts she meant obeying when the occasion arose, neglecting no opportunity of doing so.

Most Honored Father questioned another Sister, who repeated what others had said. Then he questioned Mademoiselle, who replied, “The first reason that came to my mind is that, in creating the world, God subjected all creatures to obedience. It seems, therefore, that only rational creatures have contravened this, which really obliges us to love and practice the virtue of obedience.

“Another reason is that disobedience has always been so displeasing to God that, since it was man who introduced it, it was necessary for one of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity to become man to make amends for the fault—not only to let us see by His acts of obedience how reasonable it is for us to obey, but also that our imperfect acts of obedience, by being united to those of the Son of God, may have the merit of His. This is a strong reason to acquire and practice the virtue of obedience.

“A third reason is that, without obedience, there would be continual disorder in every family, especially in Communities, and even greater among the Daughters of Charity because of the freedom their custom gives them to go to various places, and because of the interior and exterior disturbance disobedience would cause them.

“One of the means that I thought could help me to have the virtue of obedience in the way God asks it is, in my opinion, to have a high regard for it, often calling to mind the obedience of the Son of God in things that are painful and difficult for us, reflecting that He
willed to observe it unto death to serve as an example and encour-
egagement to us.

"Another means I hope to make use of is to be on the alert for oppor-
tunities of practicing obedience. If I’m not fortunate enough to have
them often in my daily actions, I thought that, when I give orders or
advice to the persons to whom I’m obligated to do so by my office,
it’s because I have been commanded to do so by the Will of
God expressed to me by my Superiors.

"As for matters of minor importance, I’ll try, with the help of
God’s grace, to defer and acquiesce more humbly to those who dem-
and something of me, provided I can do so without offending
God. And because obedience may be observed in various ways, it
seemed to me that, if it is to be in the way God asks of me, it was
imperative to obey with great simplicity and humility.

"Second, we must obey those who have a right to give us orders,
without making any distinction of persons, as if it were God com-
manding us, since it’s for love of Him that we must obey and in or-
der to do His holy Will.

"A third condition of true obedience is to do nothing to influence
our Superiors to tell us to do what we desire, but to try to have them
order us what they know God wants of us.

"In the fourth place, I think obedience must be prompt and un-
questioning, with submission of our own judgment and fidelity to
the practice of what we’re ordered to do. To my mind, it will be a
great help to us if we accustom ourselves not to be opinionated and
to yield to all sorts of persons, even in trifling matters.

"I’ve been deeply ashamed, seeing how often I’ve failed in all
those practices through my arrogance and obstinacy. I’m sorry for
this and ask pardon of all my Sisters who may have remarked it."

"Well, dear Sisters, it seems to me that you’re all filled with re-
spect for this virtue; you’re convinced that your Company, which is
so pleasing to God for what it does and the ministries to which it de-
votes itself, will also receive an increase of merit that cannot be
imagined, if it does them virtuously and for the love of holy obe-
dience. That’s why I think all of you are filled with the desire to de-
vote yourselves to it and to give yourselves now to God never to do
anything contrary to it. With my whole heart I bless and praise His Divine Goodness for all the inspirations He has given you: the reasons why it’s just and necessary to obey, the conditions that must accompany true obedience, and the appropriate means and resolutions for putting it into practice. I entreat Our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all graces are given to us, to obtain for us from the Eternal Father an obedience like He himself had, to make up by the infinite merits of His obedience for the deficiencies that are in ours, to be pleased that all of you here present may be faithful and exact in carrying out the inspirations He’ll send you by His Holy Spirit, to make the grace He has given you fruitful, to communicate it through you to our absent Sisters, and through you and them to those who come after you, so that, when they hear of the obedience that was practiced in the Company, they may feel bound to continue it. I ask this of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I entreat it of the Most Blessed Trinity, in whose name I, although a miserable sinner, supported by its infinite mercy, shall not refrain from pronouncing the words of blessing.

“Benedictio Dei Patris. . .”

45. - TO SOME SISTERS BEING SENT TO THE COUNTRY

October 22, 1650

“Dear Sisters, one of the principal virtues you must possess is humility; yes, Sisters, maintain great humility. Consider yourselves the least of everyone; remember that you’re servants of the poor; regard them as your masters and serve them with great gentleness and humility.

Conference 45. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Julienne Loret. Sister Julienne added in a note: “These instructions were given to Sisters Anne Hardemant and Geneviève Doinel, who were leaving to open the house in Hennebont; to Sisters Jeanne-Baptiste and Nicole Haran, who were opening the house in Montmirail; and Sisters Marthe [Dauteuil], Françoise Ménage, and Louise Michel, who were going to join our Sisters in Nantes.”
"The second thing you must have, Sisters, is charity—great charity with everyone.

The third thing, dear Sisters—and I recommend it above all—is mutual support; yes, Sisters, great support. Never do anything to displease one another, Sisters, never; and for that purpose, acquiesce to one another and ask each another’s advice. The Sister Servant must consult her Sister: ‘Shall we go there, Sister? Shall we do that?’ And if the Sister replies, ‘I think that would be a good idea, Sister,’ then do it. ‘But,’ you’ll say to me, ‘must the Sister Servant consult and give in to her Sister?’ Yes, she certainly must; yes, she has to do it; she must yield in everything and be the most humble, but she has to hold her own if her Sister should want to do anything contrary to God and the Rules; she must stand fast. The Sister Servant must also do nothing without informing her Sister, and have great respect for her.

So bear with one another, dear Sisters, when any slight misunderstandings arise among you—for they will arise. Give yourselves to God for that intention, beginning right now, for there’s no one who doesn’t commit some fault. What seems to us to be a fault in our Sister may not always be one. Sometimes we’re the ones who aren’t in the right mood to agree with what our Sister is doing; it’s not what we expected, and that annoys us. Let’s not be surprised at finding it hard to bear with others, Sisters, since at times we can’t stand ourselves. What pleases us today displeases us tomorrow; we’re never in the same state; we want something and then we don’t want it. We’re disagreeable to ourselves. If something happens to annoy you, Sisters, excuse one another and think, ‘It’s because I’m not in a good mood. It’s not that my Sister has done anything wrong; I’m the one who isn’t humble and can’t even stand myself.’ Lastly, Sisters, if you’ve given one another any cause for displeasure, ask forgiveness for it as soon as possible, and both of you kneel down and say, ‘Mon Dieu! Sister, I’ve given you some reason for being displeased; I ask your pardon for it.’ The other Sister should reply, ‘Sister, I’m the one who asks yours.’ By so doing, you’ll preserve union among you. Please don’t fail in this, Sisters."
“So, then, take great care to instruct those poor people, Sisters; teach them how to die well. What a consolation to help those good people get to heaven! Yes indeed, you’ll be leading them to heaven. As for your pupils, you’ll be teaching them to serve God well. You’ll do great things if you’re faithful to God, Sisters. In connection with this, I have to tell you what dear Mme Goussault, who was a great servant of God (she was a saint, Sisters; she loved your Company dearly), said to me the night before she died: ‘Monsieur, I’ve been very much absorbed with God tonight, and I’ve seen a Daughter of Charity before Him. What great things they’ll do, Monsieur!’ How happy you’ll be, Sisters, if God is glorified by your actions. Yes indeed, He’ll be glorified by them if you work for love of Him.

“Don’t waste your time ingratiating yourselves with persons of the upper class, paying them compliments and acting like Ladies of the court. O mon Dieu! no, no, don’t do that; all would be lost, Sisters. O mon Dieu! avoid that carefully.

“So, you’ll be going to visit certain persons, dear Sisters, and if you’re taken to see the Bishop of the area, ask for his blessing; tell him you want to live entirely under obedience to him, that you give yourselves entirely to him for the service of the poor, and that you’ve been sent for that purpose. If he asks you who you are and whether you’re nuns, tell him that you’re not, by the grace of God—not that you don’t have a high opinion of nuns, but that, if you were nuns, you’d have to be enclosed; consequently, you’d have to say good-bye to the service of the poor. Tell him that you’re poor Daughters of Charity, who have given yourselves to God for the service of the poor, that it’s permitted for you to withdraw, and that you may also be dismissed.

“If he asks you, ‘Do you make religious vows?’ tell him, ‘Oh no, Monsieur! we give ourselves to God to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience, some of us forever, and others for a year.’

“Lastly, dear Sisters, give yourselves totally to God to do well what you’re going to do. Ask Him for the spirit of His Son so that you may be able to perform all your actions as He did His, Sisters, because you have the happiness of imitating the life that the Son of God led with His Apostles on earth. I ask Him, Sisters, to be pleased
to fill you with His spirit and to give you the graces necessary for you to be true Daughters of Charity. This is what I beseech Him to do with all my heart and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing.

“Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”

Afterward, a Sister Servant asked, “Father, I beg you to order my Sister to remind me of my faults whenever I fail.”

“Yes, Sister, willingly, but we shouldn’t admonish someone on every occasion because what we think is a fault may perhaps not be one; we should make our prayer on this beforehand and ask ourselves, ‘Is what my Sister has done a serious fault?’ And if we see that it isn’t, then say nothing. It’s not important; it gives bad example to no one; so, ignore it. But, if God lets us see in prayer that it’s a serious fault, then attention must be called to it. However, do you know how this must be done? You should kneel down and say, ‘Sister, I think you’re willing to allow me to remind you of this fault so that you’ll be careful about it.’ That’s how you should act, dear Sisters. I recommend myself to your prayers.”

46. - THE VIRTUES OF SISTERS ANNE DE GENNES, MARIE LULLEN, MARGUERITE BOSSU, AND CÉCILE DELAÎTRE ¹

December 9 ²

The first of our Sisters mentioned at this conference was Sister Anne de Gennes. She was of noble birth and left everything to give herself to God in the Company of the poor Daughters of Charity, in which she had the happiness to persevere until death. One of our

---

¹Of the Daughters of Charity mentioned in this conference, only limited biographical data is known about Sisters Anne de Gennes and Marie Lullen.

²The year is uncertain. Since Marie Lullen was still living on July 23, 1649, the conference is probably from December 9 of that year.
Sisters who had lived with her said that Sister de Gennes was chagrined whenever anyone spoke to her of her noble birth, that it mortified her, and she couldn’t endure it.

“Ah! Sisters,” said M. Vincent, “what virtue not to seek esteem and not to want people to speak of her family! That good Sister hid what others parade and humbled herself for what would have given others reason to elevate themselves. Is there anyone here who lived with Sister Anne?”

“Yes, Father,” replied one of the Sisters, “I lived with her for a short time.”

“Well, Sister, what virtues did you remark?”

“She was very patient in her sufferings, Father, never complaining, never growing weary of suffering. She sometimes feared, however, that she was a burden and was upset because she was unable to work like the others. I also noticed that Sister was very humble: she always thought that what she did was worthless and that what others did was much better.”

“It’s all right to feel upset at not being able to work,” replied M. Vincent, “but it’s a temptation, Sisters, to think you’re a burden to others and to be troubled in such circumstances. You must be resigned to God’s Will with regard to the illnesses He sends you, and believe that your Sisters are happy to practice charity in the services they render you.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “I noticed that Sister Anne often shared with her Sisters the thoughts God had given her in prayer. She took great care that the sick whom she was nursing received the sacraments in due time. She never left a patient’s room without saying something edifying. She served poor persons as she would have served Our Lord, and used to say that she felt greater pleasure when she had been to see some poor persons than if she had been visited by her parents.”

“Ah! Sisters,” said M. Vincent, “what virtue! What a good Sister! To prefer visiting persons who were poor to seeing her own parents, and always seeing Jesus Christ in them! May God be forever blessed for that, Sisters! This should stir up in us the desire to give ourselves in earnest to Our Lord to imitate the virtues noted in this
dear Sister, who, as we've just heard, was humble, patient, and charitable. Let's imitate above all her humility, desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing, and let's reflect that, if we make a show of the little good we do, we'll lose all the merit of it before God.

"Mademoiselle, did you observe anything?"

"Father, I noted that Sister Anne had a great love of her vocation, courageously overcoming all the difficulties she encountered in it, which were far greater in her case than in that of others because her health was very delicate. Nevertheless, she didn't complain, and I never heard her say that she was unable to do what she was told. Her love for her vocation was also apparent in her last illness, for she asked insistently to be taken to the Motherhouse because she wanted to die there. She showed great patience in her sufferings and, when she was on her deathbed and someone said to her, 'You're really in a lot of pain,' she answered, 'What I'm suffering is nothing in comparison with what Our Lord suffered for me.' She was submissive and obedient to the end, for, a moment before she died, the Sister infirmarian urged her to take something, although she felt a great repugnance because of the violent pains in her stomach which were brought on by anything she ate or drank. She took it nevertheless, showing that she was doing it through obedience; and she died shortly afterward."

"Sisters," said M. Vincent, "there's every reason to believe that she's with God. Let's see now what was remarked in Sister Marie Lullen, who was a native of Le Mans. Those of you who lived with her can tell us quite simply anything edifying you saw in her conduct."

"Father," said a Sister, "I noticed that this dear Sister was very kind to the little children whom it was her duty to instruct. While she was in Nanterre, where I knew her before I had the happiness of being in the Company, I sometimes saw her kiss their feet, saying that she liked to think she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus."

"Blessed be God," said M. Vincent. "This good Sister had good reason to believe she was kissing the feet of the Infant Jesus. How pleasing He found such simplicity!"
“Father,” said another Sister, “one day I met Sister Marie when she was taking the children to Mass, and I admired her charity to a poor man she met on the way. She spoke to him of God, and since he had not heard Mass and didn’t seem to want to go, she chided him so much that she persuaded him to go.”

“I noticed that she was humble,” remarked another Sister, “and seemed content when she was rebuked. One day someone mortified her a little. Noticing that she seemed pleased, I expressed my surprise to her. ‘Sister,’ she replied, ‘I must abase myself so that Jesus may live in me.’”

“Oh! what a beautiful remark,” said M. Vincent, ‘I must abase myself!’ And she rejoiced when she was reproached; may God be blessed and glorified! I’m not surprised that the Pastor of Nanterre has praised her so highly—although he’s not very free with his compliments. But it seems that this dear Daughter had a virtue above the common run of people.”

“I knew Sister Marie Lullen while she was still in Le Mans, before she came here,” added another Sister, “and I remember that she and another young woman set aside their secular clothing and wore grey dresses; this led to their being ridiculed and mocked by those who disapproved of that change. They began to serve poor persons in the Le Mans hospital. They established great order in that house, where, until then, not much order had existed. Many people found fault with this, and they were really persecuted because of it, but they endured it courageously. In the end, desiring to give herself entirely to God, our good Sister decided to leave her family, which was very well off and in which she could have had every satisfaction, but her love of God caused her to leave everything courageously to come to our Community here in Paris.”

“Sisters,” said M. Vincent, “God doubtless had great plans for this Sister. Don’t you think there’s something in that, M. Portail? As for myself, I’m delighted with what has just been said. I never have greater consolation than when I hear an account of the virtues of our Sisters because it’s clearly the work of God. May He be forever blessed for it!”
“If anyone noticed something else, let her mention it, for you see, Sisters, God’s glory is made manifest by speaking of the virtues of our Sisters. He gave them these virtues to sanctify them, and He also wants us to profit from them by following their example. Mademoiselle, will you tell us what you know?”

“Father, this good Sister belonged totally to Our Lord, who had chosen her. She was a privileged soul. She had a special love for the practice of the hidden virtues and was very humble. I also remarked her conduct and submission when she was ill, taking the little things presented to her without showing any repugnance, and she expressed no annoyance when she wasn’t given what she requested.”

“Sisters,” said M. Vincent, “that’s how you should act when you’re ill, and not say, ‘This medicine isn’t prepared properly; I can’t take it.’ To speak like that and to express your likes and dislikes is a sign of great imperfection. If someone takes pleasure in eating and drinking or looks for tasty foods, she must be on the watch against that, for such persons are scarcely ever virtuous. How guilty you’d be, Sisters, if you didn’t profit from the good example of our Sisters, about whom such beautiful things have just been said!

“That brings us to the third Sister of whom we have to speak. Who lived with Sister Marguerite Bossu?”

“I was with her for a short time,” replied a Sister. “I noticed that she had a great love of the poor and also that, when I reproached her for something, she took it well and made no excuses.”

“She was also very quiet and gentle,” added M. Vincent. “Would you like to tell us anything about her, Mademoiselle?”

“Father, I recognized in her a great love of her vocation, for she surmounted the difficulties raised by her parents, who were very reluctant to allow her to come here; but she left them courageously, and when she was admitted, she was so overjoyed that all the wealth in the world couldn’t have made her want to leave the Community. She was in it only a year, but her fervor made her worthy of receiving her wages, like the workers who came at the eleventh hour and received as much as those who had labored all day long. In the same way, I think Our Lord was as pleased with the service this good Sis-
render Him than if she had served Him for many years because she did, in fact, have the desire to serve and honor Him all her life, however long it might have been. Sister Marguerite was very gentle and did everything she was told, without ever finding fault with it. She was very obedient and had a great love of the Community. She clearly demonstrated this when she became ill and, being told by the Sister with whom she was on mission that she should return to the Motherhouse, got up immediately and manifested the greatest pleasure at coming here, even though she was very sick.”

“What a fine Sister!” said M. Vincent, “what a good thing it is to love to come to the Motherhouse! She showed clearly that she loved only God, since she was so detached from everything. She made no difficulty about leaving the house where she was happy, in order to do the Will of God. That’s how you should act, Sisters, and never seek any pretext to dispense you from doing what you’re told.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “I remarked that Sister Marguerite was very zealous to learn what we’re supposed to know and was also very discreet in what she said; she was unwilling to speak one unnecessary word, especially during the time of silence. It made me ashamed to see her virtue and to be so far removed from it myself. She always spoke about edifying things, especially the happiness of her vocation.”

“Blessed be God forever! What excellent practices! Aren’t you touched at hearing this account of so many beautiful virtues, M. Portail?”

“We still have to share our thoughts on the virtues remarked in Sister Delaître. Who lived with her?”

“Father,” said Mademoiselle, “this dear Sister never left the Motherhouse. She was here only four months. Her ministry was to serve the poor in Saint-Laurent parish.”

“Well, what virtues did you note in her, Mademoiselle?”

“I noted great gentleness; she was very attentive to the sick, but wasn’t hasty nor anxious about that. She was active and hard-working, and looked for no notice for the work she was doing. She was very much inclined to what was good and the desire to improve, very forbearing with her Sisters, and very obedient to her Su-
Her only regret was not having served the poor for very long.”

“What a good Sister! Although young in the Company, she was mature in virtue. In the short time she was in it, she accomplished what someone else might have done in six or even ten or twelve years. What a happiness, Sisters, to live among plants that bear such fruit! But also what a shame to see ourselves still vain, still seeking our own satisfaction. If there should be any among you who might desire to be seen, to be known, and to look for notice, if there should be any, I repeat, she should humble herself before God and say, ‘O my God, what shall I say? What shall I do? What shall I answer on Judgment Day, when I’ll be reproached for having lived with the spouses of Jesus Christ, with Sisters filled with virtue, and didn’t follow their example!’ What a misfortune if there were any who might seek the appreciation of creatures or want to be commended! Nothing further would be needed to draw down the curse of God on the entire Company! I’d like to think that all of you are disposed to belong to God in real earnest. Don’t you promise me, Sisters, to determine to work at your perfection and no longer have any high opinion of yourself? For as soon as someone has a high opinion of herself, she wanders away from God. So, make up your mind, Sisters, to renounce your own will in order to no longer will anything but the accomplishment in you of the holy Will of God.”

“Yes, Father,” responded all the Sisters, “that’s our earnest desire.”

“I hope so, with the help of God’s grace,” replied M. Vincent, “and, on His behalf, I will now pronounce the words of blessing, asking Him at the same time I am saying them, to fill our hearts—mine as well as yours—with the desire to acquire the virtues of which we’ve heard the account.

“Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”
March 5, 1651

"The topic of this conference is confession, dear Sisters. It’s divided into three points. The first deals with the reasons obliging Daughters of Charity to know how to make a good confession; second, the faults they may commit in confession, and third, the means of making a good confession. This is an important subject, Sisters; and, if we don’t make good confessions, we’re in danger of often committing sacrileges.

“Please tell us your thoughts, Sister.”

"On the first point, Monsieur, I thought that one of the reasons obliging us to know how to make a good confession is that we can’t teach the sick how to make a good confession, if, in the first place, we don’t know how to do it ourselves. Another reason is that this sacrament is like a second Baptism, insofar as it restores us to grace. This is what obliges us to make a very careful preparation for it. The faults that may be committed are: not having the purity of intention of going simply to place ourselves in the state of pleasing God and seeking too much of our own satisfaction. The means of making a good confession are deep humility and the thought of the enormity of sin, etc.”

“That’s good, Sister. God bless you! And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.”

“It seems to me, Father, that if we don’t make a good confession, we’re in danger of committing a sacrilege.”

“Sister’s first reason is that, if our confession isn’t made properly, we commit a sacrilege and add to the number of our sins and, instead of the ten we had, we carry away eleven; and if you die in such a state, dear Sisters, you’re lost. And what faults may be committed during your confession?”

“It seems to me, Father, that they include not making a good examination of conscience, masking my sin, and not explaining it as it is.”

Conference 47. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Julienne Loret.
“Alas! yes, Sisters, it’s a serious sin to lessen the gravity of your sin and to confess it other than it is. How many people will be damned for that!”

“It seems to me, Father, that it’s vanity that makes us excuse ourselves, and we really don’t want people to see that our sins are as bad as they are.”

“Yes indeed, it’s a spirit of vanity, a diabolical spirit when, instead of accusing ourselves, we excuse ourselves. Sisters, it doesn’t discredit a Sister to make known her faults. Oh no! on the contrary, when she humbles herself and says, ‘I’ve done such and such; I’m so wretched as to have done that,’ then we see that it’s the spirit of God causing her to speak in that way.

“And you, Sister, why do you think Daughters of Charity must know how to make a good confession?”

“It seems to me, Father, that our predestination depends on a good confession, and we should reflect that perhaps this may be the last time God will give us the grace of going to confession.”

“Yes indeed, dear Sisters, our predestination does perhaps depend on that act. In connection with this, I’ll tell you that some Prelates told me at a meeting that they had taken the resolution, every time they went to confession or celebrated Mass, to reflect that it might perhaps be the last time. Just imagine, Sisters, Prelates are giving us this example!”

“It also seemed to me that, if God gives me the grace to go to confession one more time, I could be better disposed to go another time.”

“Our Sister says that we can make a good confession to prepare ourselves for another. That may be, because to make a good confession so as to be able to make a better one at another time is very good; and in fact, the good use of the graces God gives us is not only meritorious for the present action, but also for the next and for all others.

“But into what faults may we fall in our confessions?”

“We can make light of our sins, thinking perhaps that it’s no great matter and that we’ll do better another time, or else to diminish their gravity for fear that we may be thought less of.”
“Our Sister says that if we let any sins slip by for any motive whatsoever, what will happen? Ah! Sisters, great misfortunes! The evil spirit makes himself the master. Finally, the Sister who fails to make a good confession may fall into serious sins both in public and in private. But when, on the contrary, we’ve made a good confession, God’s grace is immediately restored to us, and all the good works we’ve done return with an increase of faith, hope, charity, love of God, moderation, and humility; in a word, with all the other virtues.

“And you, Sister, what reasons do the Daughters of Charity have to know how to make a good confession?”

“I think it’s to acquire the grace of God, Father.”

“That’s good: to acquire the grace of God. We should be happy for everyone to know our sins; one of the saints has said that we should be ready to tell our sins in the public marketplace.”

“The faults we commit in confession are human respect, which comes from vanity or even through habit, and lack of contrition. That’s all the more to be feared since sometimes our sins appear trivial. It seems to me that it’s good to mention some serious sin of our past life—even several.”

“Yes, mentioning some serious sins from our past life is a very good means to incite us to contrition: ‘My God, I did such and such when I was young,’ for it’s to be feared that we may not have sufficient sorrow for ordinary sins.

“But tell me, Sister, if a Sister goes to confession without manifesting any sorrow for her sins, is her confession good?”

“No, contrition is essential.”

“But, Sister, is it good always to accuse ourselves of the same sins?”

“No, because we have to strive to correct ourselves; but when it happens that we fall into the same sin, we have to say so.”

“You see, Sisters—I have to say this for the sake of some scrupulous souls—there are certain faults into which we can’t prevent ourselves from falling. Even the saints, as the Holy Spirit tells us, fell seven times a day; I’m talking about letting our mind wander, flighty thoughts—even during prayers—and other similar faults.”
And yet that may upset a poor Sister. What should be done then? When you keep falling into the same faults, you must humble yourselves before God, desire to be united to Him, and say, 'How I should humble myself before You, my God, and long to see You!' and then patiently make acts of hope and humility, offer yourselves to God, and stir yourselves to contrition and a firm purpose of amendment.

“But tell me, Sister, would a Sister who resented the admonitions given her be making a good confession?”

“No, Father.”

“Is it a fault to choose a confessor, Sister?”

“Yes, it is, Father.”

“Sister, what do you think of a Sister who wants one confessor and won’t have another?”

“Father, a Sister who wants one confessor and won’t have another has too great an attachment and is self-seeking.”

“But,’ you’ll say to me, ‘he knows me better, and what he says is more relevant to me.’ That’s not it, Sisters, it’s an attachment—not to say love—and it would become wrong as it continued. Take my word, dear Sisters, it’s a propensity toward that, and to put it plainly, it’s a sentimental attachment, which, if not remedied quickly, can make confession invalid. I ask God to give our Sisters the grace never to become attached to any confessor, either in this parish or in any other, and I make this prayer to God with all my heart, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, for all of you, that the confessor may not become attached, because that would be the ruin of him. God willing, I’ll say Mass for that intention, Sisters—not tomorrow but Wednesday.

“Is there any fault in saying that the confessor is too harsh or too gentle, or to complain that he doesn’t say anything?”

“Yes, Father.”
“Is it wrong to say, ‘What if he told someone the sins I told him!’ Is it also wrong to make known what he said to you?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Yes, without a doubt it’s wrong, Sisters, and very wrong, for the penitent is as obliged to secrecy as the confessor, and a person who goes off and says, ‘He told me this and that,’ sins grievously.

“If he leads her to do something wrong or makes some flattering remark such as, ‘No one has pleased me so much nor given me as much satisfaction in my guidance than you have,’ or any other remark that expresses affection, then, Sisters, beware of that! Mon Dieu! how dangerous that is! She should report it. But to whom? To her Superiors and to no one else.

“And you, Sister, tell me: does a Sister do wrong who argues about her penance, or even refuses the ones imposed on her, or doesn’t want to go to a certain confessor because he gives penances that are not to her liking?”

“Yes, Father, that seems to me to be a serious fault.”

“Doubtless a serious fault, Sisters; that reminds me of a beautiful saying of Saint Augustine, ‘A person who refuses his or her penance refuses forgiveness.’

“Does someone who goes to confession without examining her conscience, without contrition, or without a desire to accept her penance or to make restitution of the property of others in her possession commit a sin?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Sin is never, never remitted without restitution.

“Is it a sin to economize on what belongs to the poor in a parish in order to appropriate it to yourself?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Ah, Dieu! it’s a sacrilege, Sisters, because it’s taking from God something that belongs to God and using it for yourself—and I don’t think a single one of you falls into that sin; no, not a one, by the grace of God—because this sin is never forgiven without making restitution, Sisters, and not only of the property but also of honor.

“You must never speak of others, even in confession; if you can’t conceal the evil done by someone else, it would be better to re-
main silent about your own sin. But is it to deprive a Sister of her
good name if you mention a Sister’s faults to her Superioress so that
she may do something about it? Not at all! it should be mentioned,
but never to others, for to take someone’s property is nothing; but to
take away one’s honor is to deprive the person of everything. If that
has ever happened with you, Sisters, please don’t do it again.

“Now please tell us your thoughts, Sister.”

“Father, the first reason for learning how to make a good confes-
sion is that we’d otherwise often be in danger of committing
sacrileges. The second is that we couldn’t teach poor persons nor
the girls in our schools, if we didn’t know how to make it well our-

“...”

Thats why M. [Vincent], turning to the priest who accompa-
nied him, said, “Will you please write down everything those little
girls should be taught on this subject? The Sister in charge of the
new pupils will teach it to them because this is very important. And,
as long as we live, we will please have a conference every year on
this topic. I ask you, Monsieur, Mademoiselle, and you, Sister, to
remind me of it. Go on, Sister.”

“Among the numerous faults we can commit when we go to con-

ference, I noted three principal ones, Father. First, speaking too

much. That happens when we mention sins we haven’t committed,
when we talk about domestic matters, when we reveal the faults of
our neighbor, and, lastly, when we discuss things that have nothing
to do with the confession.

“Second, speaking too little; for example, when we don’t give
the number and circumstances of our more serious sins, when we
fail to mention certain sins, either because we’re afraid the confes-
sor may repeat them to someone else—which we should never
fear—or for any other motive.

---

2The manuscript has “Portail,” but this is an obvious distraction by the copyist. There is no
doubt that it is Saint Vincent speaking. Fr. Portail must have accompanied him to the conference.
“Third, not to state things clearly, that is, to cloak our sins so they
don’t appear as they really are, or to mention them as if we’re dubi­
ous about them: ‘If I have done such or such, I ask God’s forgive­
ness,’ when we’re not dubious at all, or to make excuses for
ourselves, or to keep back a sin in order to mention it to another con­
fessor. To my mind all these are serious faults. As for the means of
making a good confession, I think it suffices to be attentive to these
five points, with the grace of God.”

“That’s very good, Sister. God bless you! Mademoiselle, will
you please tell us your thoughts?”

“Father, may I ask you a question regarding what has already
been said?”

“Yes, most certainly.”

“If the confessor has no intention of giving absolution unless the
person does the penance he gives her, has the person been ab­
solved if she doesn’t do the penance?”

“No, Sisters, the confessor gives you absolution only on condi­
tion that you do the penance he gives you, and you don’t receive it if
you don’t do the penance.”

“As the first reason,” continued Mademoiselle, “I thought that
when the sacrament of Penance is received properly, it really helps
souls to glorify God, putting them in this state by the reconciliation
it brings about with His Goodness, who pardons all their sins. A
second reason is that, if we don’t do our utmost to receive this sacra­
ment well, in a certain sense we’re spurning the grace God offers us
in this sacrament, by which the merits of the death of the Son of God
are applied to us. The third reason is that we put ourselves in danger
of dying impenitent and outside the grace of God—which we cer­
tainly deserve, since we’ve refused it.

“As to the second point, there are many faults we can commit in
regard to the preparation for making a good confession, but there
are three or four major ones. One is not to have the desire to correct

\[3^3\text{A more exact statement can be found in the } \text{Catechism of the Catholic Church: “the imposition and acceptance of a penance” (no. 1480); “the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation” (no. 1491). If, through forgetfulness, the penance is not fulfilled, the penitent’s sins are still absolved—and the penance is to be fulfilled at whatever time it is recalled.} \]
ourselves, since we’re in a frame of mind that hinders us from
knowing our faults, or not to acknowledge them; this prevents us
from being able to confess them.

“Another fault is to fail to stir ourselves up to have deep sorrow—or simply sorrow—in the will, for having offended God. We
could do this easily by applying ourselves to consider the goodness
of God, His love for us, and our own perversity in having offended
Him.

“A third fault is the fear of telling our sins to our confessor as
they actually are. And a very great and grievous fault, for each of
our sins in particular or for all in general, is not being attentive to
work at correcting ourselves and of asking God for the grace to do
so.

“On the third point, the means of preparing ourselves to make a
good confession, the first thing we must do is to have a high regard
for this sacrament and a great desire to receive it, and, to that end, to
be well instructed in all that helps us to do so. Second, to go to the
confessional convinced that we’re sinners; to reflect that it’s God to
whom we’re about to speak, without considering the person of the
priest who listens to us; to accuse ourselves as consciously of guilt
and as clearly as we’re able, not making known that others are the
cause of our having offended God, being very careful, above all, to
conceal the accomplice of our sin without very grave necessity; and
not to keep anything back. Lastly, when we’ve finished accusing
ourselves, we must continue to have the remorse our sins should
have given us, listen with great reverence and humility to the advice
of our confessor, receive the penance with amazement that God
permits it to be so small, turn our minds once more to deep regret for
having offended God, and, in expectation of His mercy, listen to the
holy absolution, thinking that at that moment the merit of the Blood
of the Son of God, poured into our souls, washes away our sins. In
this way we’re totally renewed in grace and made pleasing to the
Blessed Trinity.”

“God be praised, Sisters! I’m deeply edified by all that has been
said. I think you do make good ones and, for the consolation of
many of you, let me say that, as long as I’ve been hearing your con-
fessions, I’ve been greatly consoled by them. Most of you were making very good confessions, and I like to think you’re doing even better and haven’t relapsed but, on the contrary, are doing even better and better. Courage then, dear Sisters! How happy you’ll be if you make your confessions in the manner described, for a good examination of conscience, contrition, a firm purpose of amendment, an integral confession, and perfect satisfaction! Blessed be God, Sisters! For that’s the basis of perfection and I’d like to think that, if you act in this way, God will shower you with His graces. That is what I, though unworthy, ask Him with all my heart to do and, on His behalf, I will pronounce the words of blessing over you. “Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”

48. - INDIFFERENCE

(Now 43a.)

49. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

April 25, 1652

“This conference, dear Sisters, is divided into three points: first, the reasons we have for profiting from the reminders others give us; second, the faults we may commit when told of our failings; and third, the means of benefiting from the admonitions we receive.” Because M. Vincent had been delayed by some business matter, M. Portail began to question the Sisters. The first Sister said that one of the reasons why we should profit from the admonitions we receive is the charity our Superiors have for us. Just as it’s a charity on their part to bear with us in our faults and failings, it’s a greater charity for them to admonish us and to desire that we correct our-
selves. Another reason is that if we’re not reminded of our faults, we’ll keep on committing them.

Turning to another Sister, M. Portail said to her, “What fault can we commit when we’re reminded of our failings?”

“I think that the worst fault we can commit, Monsieur, is not to accept the admonition as coming from God, who reminds us through our Superiors, and afterward to murmur and complain to another Sister.”

“So you think that one means of benefiting from admonitions is to believe that God speaks to us by the mouth of Superiors.”

“What obliges us to be content to be reminded of our faults,” said another Sister, “is that it’s a means of killing self-love, which always does its utmost to conceal our faults from us. If we find it hard to accept the charity given us, all the more reason would we find it difficult to acknowledge our faults ourselves. One means of benefiting from admonitions is to mention our own faults to the Superioress when we’re aware of them. Another is to think frequently of the faults of which we’ve been reminded so we can correct ourselves. There’s no more certain means than to ask God often for this grace because of our weakness.”

“You’re right, Sister, in saying that we must have recourse to God, for we resolve often enough to take admonitions in good part, but when the time comes, our resolutions are to no avail.”

Another Sister was saying that God would ask an account from us of the admonitions our Superiors—and even our peers—had the charity to give us, when Most Honored Father arrived. He knelt down as usual, asked M. Portail if the conference had begun, and on being told that it had, he added, “Blessed be God, Sisters! Blessed be God!”

And turning to the Sister who was speaking, he said, “Tell us your thoughts on the subject of the conference, Sister.”

“Father, I thought that what obliges us to profit from the admonitions given us is, in the first place, that we don’t know ourselves; consequently, we need someone to remind us.”

“You’re right, Sister; we’re blind, we don’t know ourselves. A blind person never sees the sun, and we don’t see our own face. That
was a very good point our Sister made; remember it carefully. Continue to tell us what you thought, Sister.”

“Father, my thought is that God will demand a strict account of the admonitions that have been given us.”

“God bless you, Sister! You see, it’s a very certain truth taught in Holy Scripture, Sisters, that God will demand an account of the admonitions given us, and if we don’t make good use of them, it’s greatly to be feared, Sisters, that the measure of our ingratitude being filled, God may abandon us, for a Sister who allows herself to be carried away by natural feelings when she has been reproved for her faults, becomes so hard-hearted afterward that nothing moves her. The less she likes what may be told her for her own good, the more she finds fault with everything that’s done. If a regulation for the good order of the house is made, she complains about it; if she sees a Sister faithful to her duty, she scoffs at her and treats her as pietistic; she has nothing but temptations against her vocation and distress of mind—all because she didn’t profit from admonitions nor resist the impulses of corrupt nature.

“Look, Sisters, Judas was lost because he failed to resist his covetousness. If a Daughter of Charity acts in a similar manner, she’ll soon leave, even though God may still continue to give her His grace, for He didn’t deprive Judas of it, although He was aware of his vice. The sun shines on a blind person as well as on someone who can see, but it shines in vain because the blind person sees nothing.

“And what did you think on the subject of this conference, Sister?”

“Father, I thought, as you stated, that not to benefit from admonitions is to grow hard-hearted. I also thought that we shouldn’t be satisfied with reminders from our Superiors but should also ask those who are with us to do us the charity of admonishing us of our faults. I’ve asked this service of my Sisters, Father, and promised them that every time they render it to me I’ll say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys for their intention and will remember them at Holy Communion.”
“God bless you, Sister! God bless you for having this beautiful practice! Dear Sisters, how I wish that this practice might be adopted among you of asking one another, especially your Sister Servants, to remind you of your faults, in order to give greater freedom to the Sisters with whom you live to tell you anything they may have remarked in you that might not be good! When a Sister asks you to admonish her, you must do it with great respect and humility and, after excusing yourself, say, ‘It’s true that I noticed this fault in you, Sister; but perhaps you weren’t aware of it.’

“Sister Servants have to be admonished as well as the other Sisters, for the saints themselves need to be reminded of their faults. The disciples were sent two by two, as today’s Gospel teaches us, so that they might practice fraternal charity.

“Now, Sisters, there are two kinds of admonitions: general admonitions and personal ones. The first are those given for all at conferences. To admonish a Sister who is vain in her appearance or who holds conversations with men is a personal admonition. If she doesn’t benefit from it, it’s for her damnation.”

Turning to another Sister, M. Vincent asked, “What fault do you think we can commit when we’re told of our failings, Sister?”

“Father, one great fault is to allow ourselves to get angry and be carried away by emotion, and then to let this be seen by our Sisters, whom we scandalize. I myself have greatly failed in that respect.”

“Did you ask pardon of the Sister in whose presence you acted that way, Sister?”

“Sometimes, Father.”

“You see, dear Sisters, you have to ask pardon of each other when you’ve disedified or displeased your Sisters so that, by this means, you may heal the wound that has been inflicted.”

Most Honored Father let us see his very profound humility on this point by telling us something we didn’t know. He said he had committed a fault in regard to a Brother, who was reporting some business matter to him. “I spoke sharply to him,” he said, “and other persons could hear it. I think M. Portail was present.” He repeated the same thing two or three times to give M. Portail the opportunity to say that he had been there, but M. Portail didn’t say a single word.
“On the following day,” M. Vincent went on, “when the same Brother was taking care of business with me, I spoke to him sharply again. I recognized my fault when I was examining my conscience, and in full chapter I knelt down and said, ‘I ask your pardon for having spoken sharply to you,’ and I asked him to ask God to forgive me. That’s what we must do when we’ve been remiss, Sisters. The wife of the General of the Galleys \(^1\) was quick-tempered, but as soon as she realized that she had been impatient, she would kneel down before her maid and ask her forgiveness. Do that, Sisters; it’s the means to preserve union; for, if you speak or correct with emotion, you strike and wound your Sister. She feels an aversion for you; considers whatever you say or do as bad; makes up her mind to do nothing to please you; she can’t stand you. But ask her forgiveness, and let her see that you’re sorry for your fault; that’s the way to remove all bitterness from her heart.

“When we’re reminded of our faults, or when we admonish others, Sisters, there’s no problem, unless it’s done in a fit of temper. Our Superiors have to admonish us; even though they see that a Sister grumbles or takes an admonition badly, they still have to remind her of her faults, for, sooner or later, she’ll profit from this. Don’t be surprised if she’s sad and crestfallen, for an admonition is a medicine and a bloodletting to eliminate bad spirits. When a very bitter medicine is brought to you, you loathe it, you scowl, you balk at taking it, but you take it nevertheless because you know it will cure you.

“The Sister who is admonished should be very careful to control her feelings, though naturally hurt and annoyed, and to profit well from the correction, even if she’s not aware of the point of which she’s being reminded. She should turn to God in her little oratory or before the Blessed Sacrament and say from the depths of her heart, ‘O my God! I’m deeply pained by this; I’m being corrected for a fault of which I have no knowledge. Well, my God, others know it; may You be forever blessed for this!’

\(^1\)Mme de Gondi.
“A Sister who acts like that, dear Sisters, will benefit from admonitions, if she makes good use of the charity shown her by those who reprove her. That’s adorning the Company, gilding it, and inserting precious stones in it. Above all, Sisters, I recommend to you the practice of our Sister who said that she asked her Sisters to remind her of her faults. And when should you do this? Begin this very evening, if the opportunity presents itself. And when should you continue? Tomorrow and forever, Sisters. I say forever, for, believe me, if you establish this practice firmly in the Company and make good use of the admonitions given you, dear Sisters, your Company will be one of the holiest in God’s Church. If you don’t, you’ll bring about its ruin. People will ask, ‘Where is that lovely Zion, of which everyone spoke so well, that lovely Company of Daughters of Charity? Where is their modesty, good order, attention, and vigilance for the poor? Where is their reserve in not speaking to men and not allowing them to enter their rooms? Where are those Sisters who died like the saints?’ None of that will be seen again.

“Sisters, it’s a question of doing something to strengthen your Company. I’ll see about the means to be taken to remedy any failing of which I’m informed. If, through the fault of Mlle Le Gras, M. Portail, the Sister Servant, or myself, you don’t advance in virtue, Sisters, we’ll have to answer for it to God, and He’ll demand a strict account of us.”

We see by this how earnestly Most Honored Father M. Vincent desired our perfection, with what care he tried to obtain it, and also the need to be thoroughly convinced that, despite the promptings of nature, our Superiors are obliged to watch over us, since they must render such an exact account.

“I’m forgetting something . . .” M. Vincent added, “I don’t remember what; please let me know, M. Portail, or tell us some thought that will benefit the Company.”

“That’s very fine, Monsieur, what a good thought! God bless you! Yes, Sisters, we must be content to be reminded of our faults.
When we’re sick, we’re glad that someone tells our father, or tells the physician, and that he is given a thorough explanation of our illness. And why, Sisters, if not to get some relief and have people sympathize with us, especially since, when they commiserate with us, we feel relieved? It’s right to want this. When Our Lord was about to die, He was certainly hoping for this satisfaction, and it was an extreme suffering for Him that no one sympathized with Him when He was on the Cross. Now, dear Sisters, sin makes our soul sick, and sick of a mortal illness; let’s be glad to have someone notify the doctor about it, that is, to notify those who can find a cure for it.

“Why not do what is done in a religious house I know, Sisters? When the Superioress is told that a Sister has committed a fault, she says to her, ‘Sister, I hear you’ve committed such and such a fault.’ The Sister kneels down and replies, ‘Mother, not only have I committed the fault you mention, but certain circumstances make it even greater than you have been told.’ Just see the virtue of those good nuns, dear Sisters. Even though someone may dislike being corrected for her faults, she disregards that and cheerfully promises to amend and to correct herself. That’s what should be done, Sisters; don’t let your emotions run away with you; overcome and cast off the sadness and distress that tries to grip your heart.

“Mademoiselle, please tell us your thoughts on the need we have to be reminded of our faults.”

“Father, we must be willing to be admonished because of Our Lord’s words to the man who had struck Him a blow in punishment for having spoken the truth: ‘If I have spoken ill, reprove me.’ Becoming angry, complaining, and looking for excuses are the faults we can commit. One means of profiting from admonitions is to believe that people do us a great charity by reminding us of our faults.”

“That’s beautiful! God bless you, Mademoiselle! See, Sisters, how Our Lord, who is innocence personified, wishes to be reproved and submits to it. Ground yourselves firmly in these practices, Sisters, so that your Company may be strengthened in virtue; and since

\[\text{Cf. Jn 18:23. (NAB)}\]
God’s graces operate according to the dispositions they find in persons, dispose yourselves to receive the blessing He’s going to give you by the most wretched and greatest sinner of all men, who offers himself to God to ask Him for the grace to benefit from all that has been said and to do forever His most holy and adorable Will. This is what I desire with all my heart, Sisters. *Benedictio Dei Patris.* . . .”

49a. - INSTRUCTION TO SISTERS BEING SENT TO POLAND

September 5, 1652

On September 5, 1652, Most Honored Father M. Vincent informed our three Sisters who had been chosen to go to Poland that they would be leaving the next morning. Divine Providence caused their departure to be postponed until September 7.

The names of the three sisters are Sister Marguerite Moreau, Sister Madeleine Drugeon, and Sister Françoise.1 Most Honored Father gave them approximately the following advice: “Dear Sisters, I think you’re aware that for more than two years the very virtuous Princess, the Queen of Poland, has been urging me to send her some Daughters of Charity to establish in her kingdom works like the ones she had seen them do in France. We needed time to reflect on this appeal to be sure that it came from God. Now there is no longer any doubt about this, since this good Lady has persevered in her de-

---

1 Marguerite Moreau, a native of Lorraine, was born in 1623; she entered the Daughters of Charity in 1646 and was sent to Angers in 1647. A strong personality, she found it difficult to get along with Sister Cécile Angiboust, the Sister Servant. In 1651, Saint Louise was thinking of naming her Sister Servant in Angers but chose her for Poland instead, where she went on September 7, 1652, with Sisters Madeleine Drugeon and Françoise Douelle. Sister Marguerite refused to remain in Warsaw with the Queen while her two companions were going to serve the poor in Krakow. She died of typhus in Poland on September 29, 1660.

Madeleine Drugeon, daughter of a rich Parisian merchant, entered the Daughters of Charity in 1647. She arrived in Poland in September, 1652, and died there in February 1671.

Françoise Douelle was the youngest of the three. After some difficulties, she adapted herself so well in Poland that she became known by her Polish name Duelska (cf. Charpy, *Documents D.C.*, Doc. 556, n. 1).
sire and has been putting great pressure on me for the past six months to send her some Sisters.

"Sisters, what a happiness the assurance of this call is for the entire Company! And what a joy for you to have been chosen from among so many others in the Company, who might perhaps do better than you! You should have no doubt of this. But why is this call a cause for such great happiness, Sisters? Here are a few reasons:

"The first is that it's God who is calling you. What a great vocation it is to be called by God! This is clear from the complaint God himself makes when persons try to work in His service when He hasn't called them. And doesn't Our Lord make the greatness of a vocation to follow Him clear when He says to His Apostles, 'You have not chosen me but I have chosen you'? So have great respect for your vocation. Humble yourselves, dear Sisters; be astounded by this grace, and be very grateful for it. If you don't humble yourselves in view of your own nothingness, amazed that God has drawn you out of poverty and lowliness to make use of you, what would you be, dear Sisters? Had you remained in the way of life destined for you by your birth, you would have been like your peers, doing the manual labor of poor people. Who would have shown you any more respect than they do to others of your background? That's why you and I have great reason to humble ourselves. This humility must be solid, however, causing you always to consider others better than yourselves."

--- 456 ---

50. - THE SPIRIT OF THE COMPANY

February 2, 1653

After saying the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* as usual, Most Honored Father began as follows: "Sisters, this conference is divided into three points: first, the reasons that oblige us to know clearly the

\[2\text{Cf. Jn 15:16. (NAB)}\]

*Conference 50. - MS. SV 9, pp. 227ff.*
spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity; second, in what this spirit consists; and third, the means of being firmly grounded in it.

“Have you made your prayer on this subject, Sister? What do you think? Why must Daughters of Charity know what the spirit of their Company is?”

“I haven’t considered the matter at great length, Monsieur, but it seemed to me that we should perform our actions in a spirit of charity, in imitation of Our Lord.”

“That’s well said, Sister. Before we go any further, however, you should know, Sisters, that to all Companies God has established for His service He has given a particular spirit, along with the esteem and practice of the virtues connected with that spirit. It is, as it were, the soul of the Company, which gives it life. Dead animals, deprived of their vital principle, are fit only to be thrown into the dump; the body can no longer act. To make this point clear, Sisters, I’ll tell you that, as God has made use of this principle in regard to Companies, He has given the Capuchins the spirit of poverty, by which they must go to God, living detached from all earthly anxieties and from all private property. To the Carthusians He gives the spirit of solitude. They’re almost constantly alone; their very name is indicative of this spirit because formerly prisons weren’t called prisons but charter houses; their spirit makes them continually prisoners of Our Lord. To the Jesuits God has given a spirit of learning to be shared with others. The spirit of the Carmelite Nuns is austerity; that of the Visitation Nuns, aimed at loving God deeply, is one of gentleness and humility. So you see, dear Sisters, that God conveys His Spirit differently to some and to others, in such a way that the spirit of one isn’t the spirit of the other.

“When God created the Company of the Daughters of Charity, He gave it a spirit of its own. It’s the spirit that animates the body. It’s important for Daughters of Charity to know in what this spirit consists, just as it’s important for a person setting out on a journey to know the route to the place she wants to go. If Daughters of Charity didn’t know their spirit, to what could they devote themselves in a particular way?
Tell me, Sister, do the Daughters of Charity have to know in what their spirit consists?"

"Yes, they do, Monsieur."

"And why?"

"Because if they don’t know it, they’ll do something very different from what they should be doing."

"And you, Sister, why must a Daughter of Charity know what her spirit is?"

"It seems to me, Monsieur, that a Daughter of Charity who didn’t know her spirit would be like a person who, without knowing a trade, would try to practice it; she’d act quite differently from the way she should; she has to learn it before adopting it."

"What you say is the truth, Sister; if a Visitation Nun led the life of a Carmelite, she wouldn’t be doing what God asks of her."

"Well now, Sister Antoinette, why do you think the Daughters of Charity must know their spirit?"

"All of them must know their spirit, Father; if anyone, out of devotion, tried to live like a nun, she’d upset her companions and would fail a great deal in the service of the poor."

"That’s well said, Sister. If the Daughters of Charity knew God’s plan for them and how greatly He wants to be glorified by it, they would consider their state fortunate and superior to that of religious. Not that they shouldn’t regard themselves as much lower, but I don’t know any religious Company more useful to the Church than the Daughters of Charity, if they really enter into their spirit for the service they can render their neighbor, unless it’s the nuns of the Hotel-Dieu and the Sisters of the Place Royale; who are both nuns and Daughters of Charity at the same time because they devote themselves to the service of the sick—with this difference, however, that they nurse them in their own establishment and assist only those who are brought to them, whereas you go to them in their own homes and minister to those who are dying without any assistance..."
because they don’t dare to ask for it. In that you do what Our Lord did. He had no home of His own; He went from town to town, from village to village, and healed everyone He met. *Eh bien!* Sisters, doesn’t that show you clearly the greatness of your vocation? Have you ever really reflected on that? *Quoi!* doing what God did on earth? Wouldn’t you have to be very perfect? Yes indeed, Sisters! Shouldn’t you be angels incarnate? Ask God for the grace to be well aware of the greatness of your ministry and the holiness of your actions.

“Leave grandeur to nuns; have a high opinion of them, but don’t seek out their society—not that it isn’t good and very excellent, but sharing their particular spirit isn’t proper to you. The same holds true for male religious as for nuns. You should never turn to either of them in your needs, so greatly should you fear to share in any spirit other than the one given by God to your Company. And how could you receive advice from a person in a religious Order, whose life is completely different from yours, and who could ordinarily advise you only according to his or her own maxims and spirit? That’s why, Sisters, in the name of God, you mustn’t frequent their society. Furthermore, you can’t do so without doing harm to the service of poor persons or children, who are in constant need of your service, whether you go to seek them out in their homes or whether you prepare in your house what they need.

“On this point, I have to praise two of our Sisters. Having heard that I was officiating at a Sister’s profession at the Visitation convent, they went there to see the ceremony and, when they saw me, asked permission to be present. Although I felt some difficulty about granting this, I still acceded to their desire. Then one of them said to me, ‘Father, Mlle Le Gras told us one time not to indulge this curiosity and not to frequent the company of nuns.’ ‘How is that, Sister? Would it upset you not to go?’ ‘It doesn’t matter to me, Father; I’ll do whatever you tell me.’ ‘Well then, go off, Sister, and mortify yourself in this matter.’ I really have to praise this action, Sisters, because it’s truly laudable. As long as you do well, I’ll praise all of you, but if you do something wrong, I’ll also reprimand you.
This incident can serve as an example to you, Sisters, because if our Sister had asked the advice of a nun, most likely she wouldn’t have dissuaded them from going to see the ceremony, and for good reason, according to her spirit; and our Sisters would have lost the merit of renouncing their own will and the slight mortification they may have had on that occasion.”

The Daughters of Charity should note the humility and deference of Most Honored Father in his reply to the Sister.

“That shows how important it is, Sisters, that you take only the advice of persons capable of giving it to you and to whom God has communicated your spirit. Our Blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva expresses this so well in his Introduction,3 ‘If a Bishop wanted to follow the spirit of a Carthusian and live like one, he wouldn’t be acting according to the spirit God has given to his office and, therefore, he wouldn’t acquit himself of his duty.’ So it’s important, Sisters, that you have no communication with nuns. But, don’t say that to them because they might perhaps think it’s through contempt. Oh no, on the contrary! The esteem you must have for them puts you very far below them. So, it’s not advisable for you to tell them that you’re forbidden to do that; for what would they think, not knowing the reasons we have for giving you this advice? How necessary it is, Sisters, for you to give yourselves to God to know your spirit! One thing you may find very helpful is to call to mind the virtues of your Sisters who have died, which were very great; and I have no doubt that there are several saints among them. You’ll find in them the marks of the true spirit of the Daughter of Charity. Try to imagine what they were, what they did, and spur yourselves on to imitate them.

“Sister Françoise,4 in what does the spirit of the Daughters of Charity consist?”

3Introduction to the Devout Life.
4Françoise Fanchon, born in Conche-les-Pots (Picardy) on June 25, 1625, entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity on August 9, 1644. She remained at the Motherhouse, where she worked in turn as gardener and cook, taking her vows for the first time in 1649. Françoise did not know how to write and made a simple cross on the Act of Establishment of the Company in 1655 (cf. XIIIb, 227). She later became Sister Servant in Saint-Médard parish. She died unexpectedly on May 12, 1689. Her companions stated that her charity and compassion extended to everyone.
“It seems to me, Father, that it consists mainly in obedience to Superiors and in the observance of the Rules. With that, I think our Sisters will have the spirit God wants them to have.”

“So, here are two signs by which to know if a Sister has the spirit of a Daughter of Charity: it was said that one sign is patience in suffering, in imitation of Our Lord; and you’re adding a second, namely, submission to one’s Superiors.

“And what other sign do you have, Sister, of the spirit of the Company of Charity present in a Sister?”

“The exact observance of the Rules, forbearance, and graciousness, Father.”

“Well now, that’s the third sign of the Daughters of Charity, and it’s very necessary to practice all three in order to imitate Our Lord; it’s not enough to work for the service of the poor; mutual forbearance and condescension are also necessary. Who doesn’t need forbearance? Think about a husband; no matter how much he loves his wife, he has to put up with her. He can’t imagine that she’ll always be the same as on her wedding day, or that in the second year she’ll be the same as in the first, or that the third will be like the second. Her moods will change, and so he has to bear with her. Likewise, the wife will have to put up with him and realize that not a day will pass without some change of mood, and he won’t be as cheerful in the evening as he was in the morning.

“The same holds true of ourselves, Sisters. We’re often so distressed and ill-humored that we have a hard time putting up with ourselves. It sometimes happens that we’re so dissatisfied with ourselves that in the evening we regret what we did in the morning. Shouldn’t our personal experience help us to bear with one another?

“Two Daughters of Charity will be on mission together. No matter how virtuous they are, they won’t always be in the same mood, and yet they have to be united and friendly with one another. One will be sad, the other cheerful; one satisfied, the other discontented. If you observe carefully you’ll see that we’re never in the same mood for a whole hour. And what must be done in such circumstances, Sisters, except to bear with one another and practice this so very necessary virtue of condescension?”
“Keep this practice in mind, Sisters; for, otherwise you won’t be Daughters of Charity but daughters of discord and confusion, which would give bad example to your neighbor and be a great scandal to her. Be on the alert so that you don’t often deceive yourself by thinking that your Sister is in a bad mood. Oh no! she’s not the one; you are. That’s why you have to endure the annoyance you feel. And if you can’t shake off the idea that she’s cranky, accede graciously to her wishes, provided they’re in no way contrary to the Will of God. If you do, you’ll be fulfilling your obligations, you’ll please God, and He’ll be glorified in you. But should it unfortunately happen that Daughters of Charity were to disregard forbearance and condescension, the neighbors would take offense and say, ‘They’re not Daughters of Charity but little demons who tear one another apart.’ Avoid this disorder among yourselves, Sisters; see the great necessity of forbearance. But someone may ask me, ‘How many times a day do we have to put up with one another, Monsieur?’ My answer is this, Sisters: as often as the occasion arises. If you bear with one another twice or four times, so much the better; that’s so many diamonds and precious stones you’re adding to your crown, and can be the greatest help to you in establishing the spirit of the Company of Charity among you. So, give yourselves to God, Sisters, for such an important matter. If you observe this practice you’ll draw down many graces on yourselves and on the Company, of which God wants to make use. Good Mme Goussault understood this truth clearly. Speaking about your Company, which she loved tenderly, she said to me one day when she was on her deathbed, ‘Rest assured, Monsieur, that this Company will be very useful to the neighbor and will bear great fruit.’ These must not be empty words, dear Sisters, and for that you must give yourselves earnestly to God so that His plan may be fulfilled in you.

“It’s getting late; we have to finish. I recommend to your prayers our Sisters in Poland, who are giving such beautiful signs that they have the spirit of true Daughters of Charity. You know about their arrival in Poland, Sisters, and how kindly they’ve been welcomed by the Queen. After giving them time to get used to the country and to learn a little of the language, she said to them, ‘Now, Sisters, it’s
time to get to work. There are three of you; I want to keep one of you
with me, and it’s you, Sister Marguerite; the other two will go
to Krakow to serve the poor.’ ‘Ah, Madame,’ replied Sister Margue­
rite, ‘what are you saying? There are only three of us to serve the
poor, and in your kingdom you have plenty of other people more ca­
pable than we are to serve Your Majesty. Allow us, Madame, to do
here what God is asking of us, as we do elsewhere.’ ‘What, Sister!
you don’t want to serve me?’ ‘I’m sorry, Madame, but it’s because
God has called us to serve the poor.’ Isn’t that beautiful, Sisters?

“O Savior of my soul, God has permitted this example in order to
animate you. Quoi, Sisters, to trample royalty under foot! What
great virtue you need, Sisters! Mustn’t you truly have the spirit God
has given the Company? How fortunate you are to have been called
to it! And how fortunate you will be if you persevere! On the other
hand, however, what a misfortune for a soul who, because she was
unwilling to submit to the Rules of the Company, should fail in fi­
delity to God and see herself deprived of His graces. Consequently,
as her fervor gradually diminishes, she’ll be on the verge of leaving
the Company on some vain pretext temptation puts before her! How
ashamed such a person should be! But I don’t think there are any of
these in the Company. If there were one and she were not moved by
this example, what could possibly move her? Not that everyone
may not be tempted, Sisters, but you have to resist courageously,
and then the temptation is a proof of true and solid virtue.

“I forgot to tell you that, when the Queen of Poland was speaking
to our Sisters about the foundlings in Paris, she added that, after
these children had been raised, they could be admitted into the
Company, and that Sister Marguerite, without too much reflection,
had replied, ‘Forgive me, Madame, our Company isn’t recruited
from, nor composed of, such persons. We accept only virgins.’

“It was God who caused her to speak like that, Sisters, to let us
know that there should be only pure and chaste persons in the Com­
pany. That’s why I’ve so often recommended that you avoid the
company of men, even should they be saints. It’s so important for

---

5Marguerite Moreau.
you to have very great respect for this virtue! I tell you once again, don’t allow men in your rooms, not even your confessors, even if it should be M. Portail. Remind them of what you’ve been told, unless it’s a case of illness.

“I didn’t tell you, Sisters, that our poor Sisters in Poland are in a town where many people are dying of the plague, and, although every possible precaution has been taken, they’re still in danger. I recommend them to your prayers. And do you know what M. Lambert did for Sister Marguerite when he sent her to serve the poor in a certain area? He placed her under the guidance of Sister Madeleine Drugeon, which she has taken very well. Let’s thank God for that.”

Most Honored Father then knelt down and said, “Blessed are You, my God, for the graces You are giving the members of this little Company. Please continue to grant them, my God, and don’t permit them to abuse them by glorying in them; but rather give them the grace to humble themselves in proportion as You raise them up, admiring Your power of working so many wonders in such lowly subjects.”

And when the Sister Servant asked his blessing for the whole Company, His Charity said with great humility, “Quoi! I, my God, wretched sinner that I am, that I should give the blessing to holy souls and to Your servants! But since You will it, I’ll pronounce the words of blessing. Benedictio Dei Patris....”

---

Lambert aux Couteaux, born in Fossemanant (Somme) in 1606, had been a member of the Congregation of the Mission since August 1629. In the early 1630s he preached in the South of France with Robert de Sergis. He opened the house in Toul in 1635 and remained there as Superior until 1637. In January 1638 he opened the house in Richelieu (Indre-et-Loire), where he was Pastor and Superior for four years. The General Assembly of 1642 named him Assistant to the Superior General. For a brief period he was Superior at the Bons-Enfants (1646-49), then at Saint-Charles. In 1650-51 he was again in Richelieu. The Saint had such confidence in him that he had him make the visitations of Saint-Lazare, La Rose, and Toul, as well as of the houses of the Daughters of Charity in Angers and Nantes.

Urged by Propaganda Fide in 1647 to designate someone as Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon, Saint Vincent could think of no one more worthy than Lambert aux Couteaux. In his response to Bishop Ingoli (cf. III, 169), he expressed himself as follows: “I must confess, Excellency, that losing this person is like plucking out one of my own eyes or cutting off my arm.” The plan, however, did not materialize. In 1651 Lambert was chosen to establish the Congregation in Poland, where the Queen was asking for the Missionaries. Everything had to be organized in that war-torn and plague-stricken country. Lambert’s efforts were blessed by God but were short-lived because he died on January 31, 1653, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. (Cf. Notices, II, 1-28.)
“Sisters, the subject of this conference is the continuation of the one we held on Sunday, which was on the spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. It’s divided into three points: first, the reasons that oblige you to know what your spirit is; second, in what it consists; and third, the means of grounding yourselves firmly in this spirit.

“Last Sunday we dealt with the first point, and I asked you how a Sister can show that she’s a true Daughter of Charity. Several of you were questioned and explained how important it is to know this spirit.

“Today we should discuss the second point. I won’t question anyone because it would be hard to find someone who could answer me, except perhaps Mademoiselle, for, if I ask you what this spirit is, you’ll reply, ‘Have you ever told us, Monsieur? Teach us what it is and we’ll give you an answer.’

“Now, for you to understand this clearly, dear Sisters, you must know the difference between your Company and many others that profess to assist poor persons as you do, but not in the way you usually do. The spirit of the Company consists in giving yourselves to God to love Our Lord and to serve Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor in their homes or elsewhere; to instruct poor young women, children, and generally all those whom Divine Providence may send you. You see, dear Sisters, this Company of Daughters of Charity is composed, for the most part, of poor young women. How excellent is this characteristic of poor young women—poor in their clothing and poor in their food! In fact, people call you poor Daughters of Charity, and you should consider it a great honor to have this title because the Pope himself considers it a great honor to be called the Servant of the Servants of God. This qualification of poor distinguishes you from those who are rich. You’ve left your villages, your parents, and your possessions. And
why? To love Our Lord and His maxims. You are His daughters and He is your Father. He begot you and gave you His Spirit; for whoever sees the life of Jesus Christ would see far and away the similarity in the life of a Daughter of Charity.

“And what did He come to do? He came to teach and to enlighten. That’s what you’re doing. You’re continuing what He began; you are His daughters, and you can say, ‘I’m the daughter of Our Lord,’ and you must resemble Him. So then, what is the spirit of the Daughters of Charity? It’s the love of Our Lord, Sisters. Isn’t it natural for daughters to love their father? And in order for you to understand what this love is, you should know that it operates in two different ways, one affective; the other effective.

“Affective love is the tender element of love. You must love Our Lord tenderly and affectionately, like a child who can’t bear to be separated from her mother and who cries out ‘Mama’ as soon as she tries to move away. In the same way, a heart that loves Our Lord can’t endure His absence and has to hold fast to Him by this affective love, which produces effective love. For the first doesn’t suffice, Sisters; you must have both. Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love. These two kinds of love are like the life of a Sister who belongs to the Charity, for to be a Daughter of Charity is to love Our Lord tenderly and steadfastly: tenderly, being pleased to speak of Him, think about Him, and filled with consolation when you reflect, ‘Quoi! My Lord has called me to serve Him in the person of the poor; what a happiness!’

“The love of the Daughters of Charity is not simply tender; it’s effective, because they actually serve persons who are poor, corporally and spiritually. It’s your duty to teach them how to lead good lives—I repeat, Sisters, to lead good lives; that’s what distinguishes you from many nuns who care for the body only, without saying a good word. There are only too many like that. Now then, mon Dieu! let’s not talk about that any longer; now then, mon Sauveur! the Daughter of Charity mustn’t be concerned only with assisting the sick poor corporally; unlike so many others, she must instruct the
poor. You have to do this in addition to what the Sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu and the ones at the Place Royale do; you also have to go to seek out poor persons in their homes, which, until now, has never been done, whereas they’re content to take in those God sends them.

“Then, you must take the sick poor two kinds of food: corporal and spiritual, that is, to tell them some good thought from your meditation—five or six words to prompt them to fulfill their Christian duty or to practice patience. God has reserved this for you. Neither church history nor secular history states that anyone has ever done what you’re doing—with the exception of Our Lord—which gives you great reason to humble yourselves. People brought the sick to Our Lord for Him to heal them, like that poor paralytic they lowered through the roof of the house. Isn’t that what you do in hospitals? Ah, Sisters! From all eternity you were destined to serve poor persons in the same way Our Lord served them! Yes, Lord, you’ve waited until now to form for yourself a Company that continues what you began.

“Another purpose of your Company, Sisters, is to teach the fear and love of God to children in schools, and you have that in common with the Ursulines. But, because their houses are large and wealthy, poor persons can’t go there, and come to you for assistance.

“Furthermore, when some disaster occurs in Paris—in wartime for example—people turn to the poor Daughters of Charity. I see no one better qualified than you to assist poor persons in every way. You wouldn’t be Daughters of Charity if you weren’t always ready to render service to persons who might need it.

“That, in broad terms, Sisters, is the essence of affective and effective love: to serve Our Lord in His members spiritually and corporally in their own homes or wherever Providence may send you.

“You should know then, dear Sisters, that the Spirit of your Company consists of three things: to love Our Lord and to serve Him in a spirit of humility and simplicity. As long as charity, humility, and simplicity exist among you, one may say, ‘The Company of Charity is still alive,’ but when these virtues are no longer seen, then
people can say, ‘The poor Company of Charity is dead.’ A Daughter of Charity who has no humility and charity is dead, for she doesn’t have its spirit; she’s like the person to whom the angel in Holy Scripture says, ‘You are dead because you don’t have charity, which is the life of the soul.’ Just as the soul is the life of the body, the day when charity, humility, and simplicity are no longer seen in the Company, the poor Company of Charity will be dead; yes, it will be dead.

“I’ve just seen a poor man from Étampes, who is very disabled. I asked him, ‘Who did that to you, my friend?’ And he replied, ‘The dead.’ That’s what the dead do, Sisters; they cause the living to die. And just as a body, from the day it no longer has its own spirit, is dead, so a Daughter of Charity who does not have her spirit is dead. Where is the charity of a Sister who has no humility or simplicity, and who doesn’t serve the poor with kindness and love? She’s dead. But, if she has these virtues, she’s alive, for that’s the life of her spirit.

“Do you understand this clearly? Do you really grasp my meaning, Sisters?”

Several Sisters said, “Yes, Father.”

Most Honored Father then went on, “I repeat once again, Sisters, that the spirit of your Company consists in the love of Our Lord, love of persons who are poor, love of one another, humility, and simplicity. It would be better if there were no longer any Daughters of Charity, if they didn’t have these virtues.

“That, Sisters, is your spirit in three points. Well now, it’s getting late. Perhaps if I begin to explain humility, I’ll wear you out; that will be for another time, please God.

“But, Monsieur,” you’ll say to me, ‘mustn’t all Christians have those three virtues?’ Yes, Sisters, but the Daughters of Charity have to be more attentive to practicing them. Anyone who sees you should know you by these virtues. Whether you’re talking with your neighbor or going through the streets, do it plainly and simply, recalling that the angels see your reserve. When you go to the refec-

---

¹Coste thought that this probably referred to burying the dead.
tory, always go with those three precious stones of humility, charity, and simplicity.

“All Christians are bound to practice these virtues, Sisters, but Daughters of Charity are obliged to practice them in a special way. ‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘don’t we have to practice all the other virtues?’ Yes, you do, but you have to practice these three especially; heaven and earth call you to this. Carthusians are obliged to practice all the virtues, but they devote themselves especially to singing the praises of God. Capuchins are obliged to practice all the virtues, but none is so dear to them as poverty. And it’s God’s Will that the Daughters of Charity devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, charity, and simplicity.

“Here’s an objection you may raise: ‘That’s all very well, Monsieur, but how can we acquire and preserve this spirit?’ I recommend two things to you, Sisters; first, to ask God for it every day at morning prayer, at Holy Mass, at noon, and throughout the day, especially at the beginning of your principal actions, saying interiorly, ‘Am I doing this out of charity, for the love of God? Am I not doing it by natural temperament or from vain complacency? For example, I come here to mention my faults to Mademoiselle; do I have enough humility to do it? Am I simple? If I use ambiguous language, if I say things other than they are, I lack simplicity.’

“The second means is to lead a good life in the spirit of a true Daughter of Charity and, at your examination of conscience in the evening, to examine yourselves to see if you’ve acted in conformity with your spirit. ‘Did I carry out my actions today in the spirit of charity? Did I not do them out of pride? Did I not use duplicity?’ If you recognize any faults in yourselves, you must do penance for them; if the fault is serious, take the discipline—but with permission; kiss the floor, say an Our Father and a Hail Mary; and if it’s customary to visit the Blessed Sacrament, do so with this intention. If you do all that, Sisters, you’ll generate in yourselves the love of lowliness and will increase the spirit of charity and of humility.

‘O Savior of our souls, Light of the World, please enlighten our understanding so that we may know the truth of what we’ve just heard, You who have formed for Yourself a Company of poor
women who serve You in the manner You have taught them. Make them Your instruments, my God, and give them and me, wretched sinner that I am, the grace to carry out all our actions through charity, humility, and simplicity in the assistance of the neighbor. Grant us this grace, Lord. If we’re faithful in the practice of these virtues, we hope to have the reward you promise to those who serve You in the person of the poor.”

As Most Honored Father was about to conclude, Mlle Le Gras said to him, “Father, I beg you to offer us to God so that we may enter fully into this spirit, and ask Him to forgive us the faults we’ve committed against this same spirit.”

“I’ll do so tomorrow at the Holy Mass I’m going to celebrate in honor of Saint Appoline, who loved Our Lord so much that she gave up her body to torture and her life for His sake. Benedictio Dei Patris....”

52. THE SPIRIT OF THE COMPANY

February 24, 1653

After reciting the Veni, Sancte Spiritus, Most Honored Father began as follows: “Well now, dear Sisters, we’re going Daughters of Charity and the many virtues that go with it. Sister, please tell us what the spirit of the Company is.”

“Father, you told us that it consists of charity, humility, and simplicity, and that charity includes two sorts of love: one affective, the other, effective.”

“You say that charity consists of two sorts of love. What do you mean by affective love and effective love, Sister?”

“Father, affective love causes us to love God tenderly and joyously; effective love causes us to move to the practice of the good works that present themselves to be done for Him.”

“Do you understand that clearly, Sister?”

“Yes, I do, Father.”

Conference 52. - MS. SV 9, pp. 235v ff.
“Did I give any example to distinguish one type of love from the other? That, dear Sisters, may be explained by the example of a father who has two sons: one is the youngest child, four or five years of age; the other is grown up. This father has two kinds of love for his children. He loves the little one tenderly, he hugs him, plays with him, is delighted with what the child says and does, and even sometimes lets the little one beat on him. That’s affective love. As for the other son, he doesn’t speak to him so often, and when he does, he speaks more seriously. He lets the little one do anything he likes. Now, if someone were to ask this father which one he loves best—the little one, for whom he shows so much affection, or the older one, for whom he doesn’t do that—he’d answer, no doubt, that he loves the older one more. And, in fact, he intends to provide him with a profession and make him his heir, but he doesn’t make a show of it. The first kind of love is affective; the second, effective. Now, dear Sisters, you must have these two kinds of love. The spirit of the Company of the poor Daughters of Charity consists of these two kinds of love for God and for your neighbor as well, beginning with your Sisters; it also consists of humility and simplicity, so a Sister is a true Daughter of Charity when she has these virtues. On the contrary, if you see a Sister who lacks charity, a sly, proud, cunning Sister, she’s not a Daughter of Charity.

“How many virtues make up the spirit of the Daughters of Charity, Sister?”

“Three, Father.”

“And what are they?”

“Charity, humility, simplicity.”

After questioning other Sisters, who answered in the same way, Most Honored Father added, “In the first conference I spoke to you about charity, the first virtue necessary for your spirit; today I’m going to speak about the two other virtues, which are humility and simplicity. First, we’ll look at the reasons why you should have this spirit; then, its characteristic marks; and third, the means of acquiring it—or of preserving it, when you have it.

“The first reason is that your spirit is for you what the soul is for the body. Now, as soon as a body no longer has a soul, it’s dead. In
the same way, a Daughter of Charity is dead as soon as she no longer has her spirit, that is, as soon as she no longer has humility, charity, and simplicity. God have mercy on her! She’s no longer a Daughter of Charity except in her attire. It would be better if she were no longer one. Have you ever seen a sick person with gangrene or an infected limb? All possible remedies are used to heal it; if they’re ineffective, the diseased limb is amputated. So, it would be better that a Daughter of Charity who doesn’t have the spirit of the Company should not remain in it—better for her own salvation, for the glory of God, and for the good of the Company because she spoils everything. There are Companies in which a single person has spoiled all the others. So then, Sisters, that’s the first reason: a Daughter of Charity is dead when she doesn’t have its spirit.

“The second reason for asking God for this spirit and for striving to acquire it is that God himself has given it to your Company. I’ve told you this before, but since all of you weren’t present, I’ll say it again. It’s not Mlle Le Gras, it’s not I, it’s not M. Portail, it’s God who has given this spirit to some great saints, now in heaven, for we can believe that some of them are there. If Mlle Le Gras, or M. Portail, or I have done anything, alas! it was rather to place some obstacle in the way of this. God is the author of works whose author can’t be found. I never thought of it; consequently, it’s God himself who did it on His own.

“The first Confraternity of Ladies established in Paris, by God’s inspiration, was that of Saint-Sauveur parish. At that time a poor young woman from Suresnes had a desire to teach those who were poor. She had learned to read while tending cows. She had procured a primer for herself, and whenever she saw someone, she would ask him to point out the letters to her; then she would spell them out, little by little, and when other people passed by, she would ask them to help her to form her words; on their return, she would ask if that was what they had told her to do. When she learned how to read, she went to live five or six leagues from Paris. We went there to give a

1Marguerite Naseau, whom Saint Vincent calls the first Daughter of Charity and whose touching story he recounts here and in other conferences to the Sisters (cf. Conferences 12, 20, 24, and 40). She died around February 1633.
mission. She made her confession to me and told me about her plan. When we set up the Charity there, she was so attracted to it that she said to me, ‘I’d like very much to serve the poor in that way.’

“Around that time, because the Ladies of the Charity of Saint-Sauveur were women of quality, they were looking for a young woman who would be willing to carry the soup pot to the sick. When that poor young woman came to see Mlle Le Gras, she was asked what she knew, where she had come from, and whether she was willing to serve the poor. She gladly accepted. So, she came to Saint-Sauveur and was taught how to administer medicines and to render all the necessary services, and she succeeded very well. And that’s how it all began, Sisters. We never thought of it. That’s how the works of God begin; they’re accomplished without anyone thinking of them. That poor girl had been led in this way from her youth.

“Requested for the establishment of the Charity in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish, she slept with a girl who had the plague, which she caught from her, and was taken to Saint-Louis Hospital, where she died. We were so impressed with that poor young woman that we accepted others who presented themselves, and they did what she had done.

“And that, dear Sisters, is how God brought this work into being. Mademoiselle never thought of it, neither did I, nor did M. Portail, nor that poor young woman either. Now, it must be admitted—it’s the rule laid down by Saint Augustine—that when we don’t know the author of a work, it’s God himself who has done it. Who gave the spirit to the poor Daughters of Charity—I mean the good ones? It’s God himself. Daughters of Charity who have their spirit have the spirit of God. God began this work; so it’s from Him. Never forget that human beings didn’t do it, but God.

“In the second place, since God turned to a poor village girl for this, He wants the Company to be formed of poor village girls. If some are from towns, all right, you have to believe that it’s God who attracted them to it, but if women of the upper class were to come, you should fear that this might ruin the Company, unless they had the spirit of a poor village girl, for God could well give them this
spirit. If society ladies were to come, you would have to be wary and test them well to see if the Divine Spirit wills them to be there. Well now, dear Sisters, that’s the second reason, namely, that it’s from God that you must get your spirit.

“The third reason is that it would be terrible for a Daughter of Charity not to have charity but rather a spirit of pride, and might try to be noticed and to control everything; she might dress in a singular way, arrange her hair to let people know that she had some, might have no simplicity, but a double-dealing spirit, inclined to conceal her thoughts from her Superior, her Director, and her Sisters. She wouldn’t be a Daughter of Charity, but rather a daughter of malice. This is very important, Sisters. Please put it into practice.

“The second point concerns the conditions or signs that indicate whether a Daughter of Charity really has her spirit. There are three signs. First, to be truly charitable. A charitable Sister is one who loves God, takes pleasure in speaking of Him, does her utmost to please and satisfy Him, and endures, for love of Him, the sufferings that come her way. How well our dear Sisters who have gone to God showed clearly that they had this spirit!

“The second sign concerns our neighbor. It’s found in the Sister who sets aside her own satisfaction for love of the neighbor, who leaves the people or places she likes, and, when told that a sick person needs her, makes no distinction of persons, and doesn’t prefer the clean ones to those in a sorry condition.

“The third sign is indifference. The Sister who has the spirit of a true Daughter of Charity is ready to go anywhere, prepared to leave everything to serve her neighbor. If we love Our Lord, we find Him everywhere.

“Those are the three signs of charity, Sisters: to love God and the poor, to make no distinction of persons, and to be indifferent to all places.

“Now let’s look at the signs of humility. A person is humble when she loves her own abjection. If there were among you a deformed person, someone who limped, who might love her infir-
mity, she would love her abjection. I knew one who had a crippled thigh that she used to call her dear thigh, her blessed thigh. That was her humiliation. That’s why she never married. In the same way, if one of you had a disfigured face and loved that scar, that would be humility. To love to think that we don’t have a mind capable of doing good is to love our own abjection. If a Sister who is criticized, rightly or wrongly, in the Company or in the parishes, loves this criticism, she loves her own abjection. If you’re questioned, as we do here, and you don’t know much to say, you must love that.

“Have a humble opinion of yourselves, consider yourselves unworthy not only of speaking well, but even of belonging to the Company, and say in regard to all things, ‘O my God, what have You done! Quot! I, a miserable Sister, to continue to do what You did on earth! I’m so wretched! I spoil everything and am incapable of anything.’ On the other hand, Sisters who have a good opinion of themselves think they’re intelligent and say, ‘I know how to earn my living; I know how to do many things.’ They boast that people miss them everywhere when they leave. What a cursed state of pride!

“So, that’s the first sign of humility, Sisters: to have a lowly opinion of yourselves, to think that you spoil everything, like Job, who said, ‘I fear there is sin in all my actions.’ We may say of a Daughter of Charity who has such fear that she has true humility. A Sister is also humble who always takes the worst for herself, who always wants to be last, who says all the good she can of her Sister companion so that the latter may be appointed Sister Servant, and speaks disparagingly of herself so that she may no longer be one. That, Sisters, is a true indication of humility.

“The third sign is found in those who are distressed at being praised and upset when they hear someone commend them. It’s a bad sign when a Daughter of Charity is pleased to be praised and

2Isabelle du Fay, a Lady of Charity of eminent piety, entirely devoted to Saint Vincent, whom she assisted with her wealth. If a troublesome infirmity—one of her legs was two or three times larger than the other—had not prevented her, she would have taken a much more active role in the Saint’s work. Her paternal uncle, René Hennequin, was married to Marie de Marillac, Saint Louise’s aunt.

3Cf. Jb 9:28. (D-RB)
does all she can for that purpose. We’re humble when we love our own abjection.

“Here now are the signs of the virtue of simplicity. A Daughter of Charity is simple when she carries out the orders of her Superiors without asking why these orders have been given her. The Sister who says, ‘Why do they want me to do that?’ and picks them apart, has a quarrelsome disposition and is far from the simplicity that causes Sisters to obey the Rule without questioning it.

“A truly humble Daughter of Charity isn’t concerned with what people will say about her, or what will happen to her when she obeys; she doesn’t reflect on what people will think of her, whether they have a good or bad opinion of her, whether she’s regarded as virtuous or not; it matters little to her if there’s some embarrassment in serving the poor, practicing virtue, or doing some act of charity. A Sister who has the virtue of simplicity pays no attention to all that. And here’s another sign, dear Sisters, namely, to say what you think. If Mademoiselle asks a Sister a question, she must say what she thinks, but if another Sister comes and asks you what Mademoiselle said to you, you must keep silence if there’s any harm in making it known. I repeat, if you have to give an account to your Superiors, tell things just as they are and conceal nothing; you’re obliged to be simple toward them, and Sisters who are not are two-faced.

“There are things about which you must be silent; as for example, if your Superiors told you to keep a secret, or you were in danger of causing harm to your neighbor. Prudence then commands us to be silent. But when you must speak, dear Sisters, then speak quite simply. As for myself, I don’t know, but God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel. I have special devotion and consolation in saying things as they are.

“We still have to speak about prudence, but it would take too long; that will be for another time, please God. Let’s now look at the means of acquiring this spirit, dear Sisters, and, for those who already have it, the means of preserving it.

“The first means is to ask God for it. If there’s anything we should ask of God it’s our spirit, as I told you recently, because it’s
the life of our soul. Ask it of God, Sisters, at mental prayer and in all your prayers, as often as you can.

"The second means, Sisters, is what I just told you, since a Daughter of Charity who doesn't have the spirit of charity is dead; she does live an animal life, but the supernatural life is dead. How pleased God is with a Sister who strives to acquire these virtues! He loves that Sister; He takes His delight in her; she's like a beautiful sun in His eyes; He points her out to the blessed and to our dear Sisters now in heaven.

"Well now, dear Sisters, let's take the resolution to work at our perfection, no matter what the cost, and each day let's say, 'I want to be charitable, humble, and simple.' If you're at table, be charitable; if someone with you needs something, point it out humbly; have a humble attitude so that no affectation or self-sufficiency is apparent.

"With regard to simplicity, you can't very well keep or preserve it here except by using quite simply the things that are given to you.

"As a third means, dear Sisters, examine yourselves daily to see if you've been careful to practice these virtues; ask yourselves often, 'Have I done any acts of charity, humility, and simplicity?' And if you see that you've done one, thank God, Sisters, for He wants to be thanked for it; but if you see that you've failed, Sisters, do penance in order to help yourselves to rise more easily from those faults by the punishment you'll impose on yourselves.

"Well now, dear Sisters, please remember this carefully because if ever there was a useful conference, it's this one. If there's anything in the world for which you should ask God, it's your spirit; and if you must give yourselves to God for any purpose, it's for that one. So then, may this spirit always be apparent in your coming and going; may people always see the spirit of charity, humility, and great simplicity, and that you never make use of craftiness. If you live in this spirit, dear Sisters, how propitious charity will be, how you'll honor it, how it will grow!

"Speaking of this, I recall that the night before the late Mme de [sic] Goussault died, she said to me, 'Monsieur, all night long I've seen the Daughters of Charity before God; how they will grow in
number and do good! How happy they will be!' That means, dear Sisters, that if you’re good and you work to have your spirit, then God will be glorified in you, for He wants to be glorified by our good works. So, strive then with all your might to acquire these virtues of charity, humility, and simplicity, never concealing anything from your Superiors.”

All the Sisters knelt down, and Most Honored Father was about to give his blessing when one of them said to him, “Please allow me to accuse myself of a fault I committed a long time ago.” After M. Vincent had given his consent, she added, “I ask pardon of God, of you, Father, and of the whole Company for something that happened when I was with a Sister who is now dead. I took a book from her without her knowledge. It was a beautiful book and I wanted to keep it. She looked for it and asked me about it; I told her I hadn’t seen it. It happened that I was missioned from that place. God permitted that for my own good because I also intended to take something else. One day at prayer I was so tormented with remorse that I deeply regretted having committed such a serious fault and having lied to the Holy Spirit, denying something that I knew was true. At once I resolved to ask God’s pardon and to hand the book over in your presence and in that of the whole Company. I do so now, and I ask you with all my heart to please ask God’s forgiveness for me.”

“I’ll do so very willingly, Sister. My God, may You be blessed, You who allow our faults to present us with the opportunity of practicing the virtue of holy humility! Oh! happy fault, Sisters! How happy we’ll be if our faults bring us back to God, for you committed a great fault, Sister, but consequently God has been honored by the act of humility you’ve just made. I ask Our Lord to give this grace to all of you. Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”