

CHAPTER III

Instruction which the Queen of Heaven Gave Me on the Four Vows of My Profession.

443. My daughter and friend, I do not desire to deny thee the instruction thou askest of me with the desire of putting it into practice; yet do thou receive it with appreciation and a devout spirit, promptly putting it into action. The Wise Man says: *My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, thou hast engaged fast thy hand to a stranger; thou art ensnared with the words of thy mouth, and caught with thy own words* (Prov. 6:1-2). According to this truth, she who has made vows to God has nailed the hand of her own will, so she is neither free nor has the choice of other works beyond those to which she has obligated herself, which are according to the will and choice of Him to whom she remains obligated and bound by the words of her own mouth spoken in the profession of her vows. Before taking the vows the choice of her path was in her own hands; but having bound and obliged herself the religious soul knows she has entirely lost her liberty and delivered herself to God in her superior. The whole ruin or remedy of souls consists in the use of their free will; but since most misuse it and lose their souls, the Most High established the permanent state of religious life by means of the vows, so the creature, by once using her liberty to make a perfect and prudent choice, can surrender to His Majesty in that act the very liberty by which many are lost if they remain unbound and free to desire or not to desire.

444. By these vows the liberty to do evil is happily lost, and the liberty for doing good is assured, like a bridle which leads away from danger and directs onto the smooth and secure road. The soul loses her servitude and subjection to her passions, and acquires new domination over them, as a lady and queen in the dominion of her republic, remaining subordinate only to the law of grace and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who shall govern her in her operations if she applies her whole will to do only what she has promised to God. In this way the creature passes from the state and existence of a slave to the excellent dignity of a daughter of the Most High, and from an earthly condition to an angelic, while the corruptible defects and penalties of sin cannot fully affect them. It is not possible in mortal life to know or comprehend what and how many goods and treasures the soul gains who disposes herself with all her powers and affections to fulfill perfectly the vows of her profession; yet I assure thee, my dearest, that perfect and punctual religious can attain the merit of the martyrs, and even surpass them.

445. My daughter, thou didst happily begin to obtain such goods on the day when thou didst choose the best part; yet take special notice that thou hast bound thyself to an eternal and mighty God, to whom the most hidden secrets of thy heart are manifest. If lying to earthly men and failing them in just promises is something so ugly and abhorrent to reason, how grave shall infidelity to God be in the most just and holy promises? As thy Creator, Preserver and Benefactor thou owest Him gratitude; as Father reverence; as Spouse fidelity; as a Friend amiable correspondence; as the most Faithful thou owest Him faith and hope; as the highest and eternal Good thy love; as the Omnipotent thy subjection; and as the most just Judge thou owest Him holy fear and humility. Hence against all these titles and many others thou dost commit perfidious treason in breaking the promises thou hast made in thy profession. And if in all the nuns who live obligated to a spiritual life and conversation it is such a tremendous monstrosity to call themselves spouses of Christ while being members and slaves of the devil, much more

abominable shall it be in thee, who hast received more than all of them, and thus must exceed them in love, in labor, and in the return for such incomparable benefits and favors.*

446. Hence be warned, soul, how abhorrent this fault would make thee in the sight of the Lord, of myself, and of the angels and saints, since we are all witnesses of his love and fidelity which He has shown thee as a rich, loving, and most faithful Spouse. Work then with highest watchfulness to avoid offending Him either in great or in small things. Do not force Him to abandon thee and deliver thee to the beasts of sinful passions,† for thou art not unaware that this would be a greater unhappiness and punishment than if He delivered thee to the fury of the elements, and all the fierce and brute beasts, and to the demons themselves; for if all these would execute their wrath upon thee, and the world heap upon thee all sorrows and dishonors possible, all would do thee less damage than committing one venial sin against God, whom thou must serve and love in all things and through all things. Any punishment in this life is less than that of sin, for those in mortal life shall end, while the guilt of sin can be eternal, along with its pain and chastisement.

447. In the present life any pain or tribulation causes much fright and dread to mortals because they have it present to the senses which affect them, yet they are not disturbed or frightened by guilt; since they are engrossed in what is visible, they do not consider the simultaneous consequence of sin, which is the eternal punishment of hell. Imbibing and uniting with sin itself is so grave, and the human heart so sluggish, that it allows itself to become intoxicated with guilt, and is not affected by pain because it cannot feel the pain of hell by the senses; and when it could see and sense it by faith, it leaves it idle and dead as if it did not possess it. O most unhappy blindness of mortals! O apathy and negligence, which keeps so many souls capable of reason and glory deceitfully oppressed! There are no words or reasonings sufficient to describe this terrible and tremendous danger. My daughter, escape and flee with holy fear such an unhappy state, and deliver thyself to all the labors and torments of life, which soon pass, rather than incur such a danger, for nothing will be lacking to thee if thou dost not lose God. A very powerful means of assuring this is not to imagine there is any small fault for thee or for thy state; the small faults must be greatly feared, since the Most High knows that by despising small faults the creature opens the heart to admit other greater ones. That is not a praiseworthy love which is not zealous to avoid any displeasure of the beloved.

448. The order which religious souls must keep in carrying out their desires must be in the first place to be solicitous and punctual in fulfilling the obligations of their vows and all the virtues which are included therein. After this in the second place they may engage in voluntary works, which are called works of supererogation. This order some souls usually pervert, being deceived by the demon with indiscreet zeal for perfection; who though failing in the obligations of their state by serious faults, yet desire to add other voluntary actions and occupations which are ordinarily small or useless, and originate from a spirit of presumption and singularity, desiring to be seen and signalized among others as very zealous and perfect, while being very far from even the beginning of perfection. I do not want to see in thee a decline so reprehensible; instead, I desire thee first to comply with the observance of thy vows and of community life, and afterwards add what thou canst with the help of divine grace and according to thy strength. All this together shall beautify the soul, and make it perfect and agreeable in the eyes of God.

* cf. Lk. 12:48 [Ed.]

† cf. Ps. 73:19 [Ed.]

449. The vow of obedience is the greatest in religion, for it consists in a total renunciation and denial of one's own will, in such a way that the religious has no jurisdiction or right over himself in anything to say: I desire or I do not desire, I shall or I shall not act. All this he subordinates and renounces by the vow of obedience, leaving himself in the hands of his superior. In order to fulfill this vow it is necessary for thee to *be not wise in thy own conceit*, nor imagine thyself sovereign over thy preference, thy desire, or thy understanding; since true obedience must be of the quality of faith, that which the superior commands must be esteemed, revered and believed, without any prerequisite of examining or understanding it.* In accordance with this, in order to obey thou must consider thyself without opinion, or life, or speech, but allow thyself to be moved and governed like a dead body, alive only in order to execute promptly all the superior wills. Never discuss within thyself whether thou shouldst fulfill his commands or not; only think of how to execute what is commanded thee. Sacrifice thy own will and cut off all thy appetites and passions, and when by this efficacious determination thou art dead to thy selfish movements, then shall obedience be the soul and life of thy works. In the will of thy superior thou must regard thy own will with all its activity, words and works. In all things pray that thy very being be removed and another new one given thee so nothing shall be thine, and all be obedience without contradiction or resistance.

450. Be advised that the most perfect manner of obeying is for thy superior to recognize no disagreement in thee to his disgust, but rather the satisfactory obedience owed to him, that he may know that what he commands is promptly carried out, without reply or murmur manifested by words or disgruntled movements. The superior takes the place of God, and whoever obeys their superiors obeys the Lord himself who is in them, governs them, and enlightens them in what they command their subjects for the good of their souls and their salvation. The contempt shown to superiors passes on to God himself (Lk. 10:16), who in them and through them is manifesting and commanding his will to thee. Thou must understand that the Lord himself moves them to speak, or it is the language of the omnipotent God himself. My daughter, work to be obedient so thou mayest sing of victories (Prov. 21:28). Do not fear to obey, since that is the secure path, so secure that God will not bring to account the errors of the obedient on Judgment Day; on the contrary, He will blot out other sins for the sake of the sacrifice of obedience alone. My most holy Son offered to the eternal Father his most precious Passion and Death with particular affection for the obedient, so by this virtue they would receive an increase in pardon and grace, and success and perfection of all they would work by obedience; and now many times He presents to the eternal Father, in order to appease Him toward men, that He died for them obedient unto the cross (Philip. 2:8), and by this the Lord himself is appeased. He was so pleased with the obedience of Abraham and his son Isaac, He held Himself obliged not only to save the son from death, who showed himself so obedient, but to make Abraham the forefather of the Onlybegotten made man, and signalize him from among the rest as the head and foundation of such blessings (Gen. 22:16-18).

451. The vow of poverty is a generous renunciation and detachment from the heavy burden of temporal things. It is an alleviation of the spirit, a relief provided for human weakness, and liberty for the noble of heart to strive after eternal and spiritual goods. It is a satisfaction and satiety which pacifies the thirsty appetite for earthly treasures, and a dominion or possession and most noble use of all riches is established. All this, my daughter, and other great goods are

* Our Lady is here speaking of commands which do not involve sin, as She says in *Incarnation* par. 241 in which She tells Ven. Mary to obey *in all that is not sinful*. [Ed.]

contained in voluntary poverty; yet the children of this world completely ignore them and are deprived of them because they are lovers of earthly riches and enemies of this rich and holy poverty. They do not consider, though they experience and suffer it, how forceful is the gravity of riches which pulls them to the earth and even into its very depths to seek gold and silver with anxiety, sleeplessness, labors and sweat, not as men possessing reason but like irrational brutes, unaware of what they are doing and suffering. And if they are so weighed down before acquiring riches, how much more when they are obtained? The multitude who have fallen into hell with their burden proclaim it; the excessive efforts in preserving their riches proclaim it, and much more the intolerable laws which riches and those who possess them have introduced into the world.

452. If all this suffocates the spirit, tyrannically oppresses its weakness, and debases the most noble capacity the soul has for eternal goods and God himself, it is certain that voluntary poverty restores to the creature its excellent condition, relieves it from the most vile servitude, and establishes it in the noble liberty in which the creature gains mastery of all things. The soul is never more a sovereign than when it despises them. Then does it have the greatest possession and the more excellent use of riches when it distributes them or leaves them of its own free will; then is the appetite for them satiated when it takes no pleasure in possessing them. Above all, leaving the heart unburdened it is made capable of having God deposit within it the treasures of his divinity, for which it was created with an almost infinite capacity.

453. My daughter, I desire thee to study diligently this divine philosophy and science, so forgotten by the world, and not only the world but many religious souls who have promised it to God, whose indignation is great because of this sin. The transgressors of this vow shall suddenly receive heavy and unexpected punishment, since by abandoning voluntary poverty they have driven away from themselves the spirit of Christ, my most holy Son, and what He and I came to teach men in abnegation and poverty. Though at present they do not feel it because the just Judge delays and they enjoy the abundance which they desire, yet in the reckoning which awaits them they will find themselves confused and confounded by the rigor of divine justice which they did not consider, ponder or weigh.

454. The temporal goods were created by the Most High to serve men only for sustaining life; having attained this end the cause of their necessity ceases. Since this need is limited and soon satisfied with the little required, there is no reason for the care for one's immortal soul to be temporary and as it were in passing, while the desire and eagerness to acquire riches becomes perpetual and permanent among men. It is the height of perversity for man to exchange the end for the means in something so important and so urgent; that oblivious man gives to his brief and insecure life of the body all his time, all his care, all the exertion of his powers, and all the alertness of his mind, yet in the many years of his life he does not want to give to his poor soul more than one hour, and that very often the last and worst one of his whole life.

455. Hence take advantage, my dearest daughter, of the true light by which the Most High has undeceived thee in regard to such a dangerous error. Renounce all affection and love for any earthly thing; even if it is under the pretext and color of necessity and the poverty of thy convent, do not be inordinately solicitous in procuring the things used for the sustenance of life. When thou dost exert moderate solicitude as thou must, let it be in a manner which shall not disturb thee when thou dost fail to obtain what thou dost desire, nor do thou desire it with fondness, though it seems to be for the service of God, since thy love for Him is less the more thou dost desire to love other things with Him. Great possessions thou must renounce as superfluous; thou dost not need them, and it is a crime to vainly keep them. The little thou dost need must also be

little esteemed, since it would be a great error to burden the heart* with that which is of little value yet can hinder it greatly. If thou dost obtain what thy human judgment requests as necessary, thou art not truly poor; for poverty strictly and properly speaking is having less than what is necessary, and only he who lacks nothing is called rich. To possess more than is necessary causes unrest, and is affliction of spirit; to desire and keep it without using it engenders a poverty without peace or tranquility.

456. Of thee I desire this liberty of spirit, unattached to anything, be it great or small, superfluous or necessary. Of the things which are necessary for human life, thou must accept only what is strictly required to prevent death or indecency; yet thy coat should be the most poor and sufficiently patched, and thy food the most coarse, without indulging thy particular taste or asking for more than what for thee is more bland and less pleasing, so thou mayest be served what is disagreeable and be deprived of what the appetite craves, doing in all things what is most perfect.

457. The vow of chastity includes purity of soul and body; it is easy to lose, but difficult and even impossible to repair depending upon how it is lost. This great treasure is deposited in a castle which has many doors and windows, and if these are not all well guarded and defended the treasure is without security. My daughter, in order to preserve with perfection this vow it is essential to make an inviolable pact with thy senses,[†] not to use them except for what is according to the dictates of reason and for the glory of the Creator. Once the senses are mortified it is easy to overcome thy enemies, for only through them can they conquer thee; for thoughts cannot recur or be awakened to activity unless the images and impressions gain entrance through the exterior senses which foment them. Thou must not touch, nor look upon, nor speak to any human person of whatever condition, whether man or woman, in a manner which allows their impressions and images to gain entrance into thy imagination. In this carefulness with which I urgently charge thee consists the guard of the purity which I desire of thee; and if through charity or obedience thou shalt speak with them (for only by these two causes must thou converse with creatures), do so with all gravity, modesty and restraint.

458. Regarding thyself live as if thou wert a pilgrim and stranger in this world; be poor, mortified, laborious, loving the hardship of all that is temporal, without craving rest or enjoyment, as one who is absent from her home and fatherland, enlisted to work and battle against powerful enemies. And because the most burdensome and dangerous obstacle is the flesh, thou must resist thy natural passions without neglect, and in them the temptations of the demon. Raise thyself above thyself, and seek a habitation elevated far above all that is earthly, so thou mayest live under the shadow of Him whom thou dost desire (Cant. 2:3), and in his protection enjoy tranquility and true peace. Deliver thyself with thy whole heart and strength to his chaste and holy love, without attending to any creatures except insofar as they may help and oblige thee to love and serve thy Lord; in all other respects they must be to thee abhorrent.

459. Although no virtue should be lacking to her who is called a spouse of Christ, and possesses this title by profession, yet it is chastity which most proportions and assimilated her to her Spouse, for it spiritualizes her and withdraws her from earthly corruption, raising her to an angelic existence and even to a certain participation of the very being of God. It is this virtue which beautifies and adorns all the rest, raises the body to a superior state, enlightens the understanding, and preserves souls in their nobility above all that is corruptible. Because this

* cf. Mt. 6:31-33 [Ed.]

† cf. Job 31:1 [Ed.]

virtue was a special fruit of the Redemption, merited by my most holy Son on the cross where He took away the sins of the world, for this reason Holy Scripture specifically states that virgins accompany and follow the Lamb (Apoc. 14:4).

460. The vow of enclosure is the wall of chastity and of all virtues, and the environment in which where they are preserved and shine forth; it is a privilege of heaven exempting the spouses of Christ in religion from the burdens and dangerous tribute which the freedom of the world pays to the prince* of its vanities. By this vow the religious live in a secure port, while the other souls upon the sea of dangers become disoriented and founder at every turn. With such grand advantages enclosure is not a confinement in a narrow space, but a place where the religious is offered the spacious fields of the virtues, of the knowledge of God, of his infinite perfections, mysteries, and wonderful works He has done and is doing for man. In these vast and spacious fields a religious can and should roam and recreate, and the failure to do so makes the greatest freedom seem a narrow prison. For thee, my daughter, there is no other expanse in which to roam, yet neither do I desire thee to confine thyself to such narrow limits as the entire world. Rise up to the height of divine knowledge and love, where without ends or limits to restrict thee thou mayest live in spacious liberty. From there thou shalt know how constricted, vile and despicable is all that is created for expanding thy soul within it.

461. To this enforced enclosure of the body thou must add the restriction of thy senses, so they may be clothed with fortitude and preserve thy interior purity, and in it the fire of the sanctuary (Lv. 6:12) which thou must always nourish and keep from being extinguished. And in order to guard the senses and ensure enclosure, never approach the door, nor the speaking grate, nor the window, nor even remember the convent has them, unless it is required by some particular office or by obedience.† Do not crave anything, since thou shalt not obtain it, and do not labor for that which thou must not crave. In thy retirement, caution and circumspection shall be thy good and thy peace, pleasing me and meriting the copious fruit and reward of love and grace which thou dost desire.

* cf. Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 [Ed.]

† As an example, the King of Spain, Philip IV, having heard of the great virtue of the humble nun in Ágreda, desired to receive her counsel regarding the administration of his kingdom, an office which Ven. Mary fulfilled for 22 years. They would speak through the grate, and the King would write his questions on one side of a sheet of paper and she would give her answer on the other side. They also corresponded by letters. cf. *Cartas de Sor María Jesús de Ágreda y del Señor Rey Felipe IV*, Suc. de Rivadeneyra, Madrid, 1885. [Ed.]