

Duties of Superior



THE DUTIES OF A SUPERIOR
(1770-1775)

by

The Reverend P.J. de Clorivière, S.J.

To the Abbess of the English Benedictines at Brussels CM. Ethelreda Manook)

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To the Abbess of the English Benedictines at Brussels (M. Ethelreda)

Madame:

I offer your Ladyship this little book on the duties of your position, which your humility and ardent desire of perfection prompted you to desire of me. It is consoling for me to outline here the duties you try so carefully to fulfill. For the most part you avoid the faults I point out. This must arouse your fervor more and more, as well as your gratitude towards God, Who has poured out on you so many graces and precious gifts.

Still, as long as we are pilgrims in this life, there is always much to do to attain perfection, always much to correct in our conduct. You will easily notice where you fail. On this point I have some reason to fear that at the sight of the sublime perfections described in these pages and the many faults pointed out as very harmful to superiors, your humility may persuade you that you are lacking in all these perfections and guilty of all these faults. I warn you, therefore, to be on guard against such an excess. It goes beyond the limits of perfection and might degenerate into a vice. Recognize God's gifts with gratitude...and if you have not acquired all the virtues which make a perfect superior, you must not be in any way surprised, you must not be at all discouraged. This example of perfection is traced out for you by Jesus Christ. Who then could be surprised to find herself far from such a model on many points? It is the most perfect of models which is placed before you, not that you will be able to reproduce it in all its beauty, but that, having it always before your eyes, you may each day imprint some of its features on yourself. Thus you will always be coming nearer to the divine likeness. Be careful to avoid the haste which makes you want to be perfect all at once and freed, without any effort, from all faults and imperfections. Desire perfection, but desire it peacefully and according to the measure in which God will be pleased to grant it to you. Learn to bear patiently the defects which you may discover as you read the following pages.

Here is the way to read this book: after having read it through the first time in order to have a general idea of its contents, go back over each part. Do not leave any part without making some resolution in conformity with the subject matter. If you do this faithfully, I hope that divine grace will help you find in these pages something that will help you to carry out your very important responsibilities more perfectly. This is the precious blessing that I humbly ask Our Lord to bestow on this little work undertaken solely for His glory and the welfare of His beloved Spouses. Amen.

CHAPTER I

A CORRECT IDEA OF THE SUPERIORSHIP AND THE FEELINGS WHICH THIS IDEA SHOULD INSPIRE.

If you are to fulfill your duties as you desire, glorifying God as much as you can and working effectively at your own perfection and that of the souls entrusted to your care, you must first of all understand the extent of your obligations. To do this you must form a true idea, a correct notion, of your responsibility. I use this word in preference to that of dignity, because, although the latter is entirely suitable to the greatest and most honorable work which your sex may undertake in religious government, nevertheless the first serves better to recall the duties in which you desire to be instructed. Dignity and pre-eminence are what the world and corrupt nature consider, even in religious superiorship. It is not unusual to find that this point of view feeds and increases pride and self-love in those very persons who, on account of their office, should be the humblest and the most completely dead to self. But such false and pernicious ideas are far from our minds! Very different are the views put before us by faith and expressed in our Rule. It is true that these remind us of the dignity, and the very great dignity, of such an office, but they show, too, that this dignity has no worldly grandeur and can give no occasion for pride, since self can find there nothing of its own. It is a dignity that is holy in every way, and it imposes on anyone who bears it the obligation of great sanctity. "The Superior," says the Rule of St. Benedict from the beginning, "must always remember the responsibility he is called upon to bear." Further on, in explaining the nature of this responsibility, the Rule adds, "The Superior represents the person of Jesus Christ Himself in the monastery."

First Consideration

The Superior Represents Jesus Christ

This is an evident truth, since it is from Jesus Christ that the Superior holds her authority, it is only in His name that she commands, and it is He Whom the subjects obey in her person. All the respect shown her is rendered to Jesus Christ, and it is because of her position as interpreter of His Will that all should conform their wills and judgments to her and open their souls to her with confidence. She could not require anything of the sort, if she required it in her own name and did not represent the very person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, to have a correct and adequate idea of your position and the obligations inseparably connected with it, you must think of what it means to hold the place of Jesus Christ and hold it worthily. You must not only be a superior as Jesus Christ was, but you must be a superior such as Jesus Christ was. With all due proportion, it means that you, as head, must do for

all the members of your community what Jesus Christ, as head of the whole human race; did for all mankind during His mortal life.

Jesus Christ always showed towards us the care of a father, the tenderness of a mother, the attentiveness of a master, the vigilance of a pastor, the kindness of a friend, the affection of a brother, and the love of a spouse. His feelings even went beyond all this; He looked upon us and He loved us as His own members, as part of Himself. He seemed to forget His own interests and to think only of what concerned men, His brothers. He made Himself the servant of all. He exposed Himself to all sorts of insults, He bore all sorts of torments, sorrows, and afflictions to buy our happiness and glory at this price. There was nothing too hard for Him to bear willingly in order to give us an example. Every moment of His life was used to teach us and to do good to all. In a word, "He has borne our infirmities, He has carried our sorrows" to deliver us. To be a Superior resembling Jesus Christ, to represent His person worthily, you must imitate Him, so far as possible, on all these points, the sole points by which He wished to be recognized as our Superior.

Those who think of the superiorship as a burden that is easy to carry, who believe it is a position of leisure which puts them beyond the Rule and gives them freedom to allow themselves whatever they wish, to follow their own whims and desires – such persons I assure you, deceive themselves greatly if, in spite of all this, they believe they are worthy representatives of Jesus Christ. It is true that they represent Him in their position as Superior, and in virtue of this title they have a right to the same respect on the part of their subjects. However, they are infinitely far from representing Jesus Christ in their manner of government, and it cannot be said that they represent Him as they should in order really to procure their daughters' welfare or their own.

In order to fulfill the obligations included in this great duty of representing Jesus Christ, a Superior must make herself all to all. She must always keep in mind the needs of those entrusted to her. She must spare neither suffering nor fatigue to obtain their spiritual welfare, which must be as important to her as her own. For this purpose she must sacrifice ease, joy, even spiritual consolations. She must give every moment of her life and even her life itself should that be necessary. She must instruct the ignorant, relieve the sorrowful, bear with the imperfect, support the weak, help souls in temptation, carry the burdens of every one, and in the sight of Jesus Christ make herself the least and the servant of all the others. Above all, she must do her utmost to be eminent in virtue and, as is said in the Rule of St. Benedict, Part 3:7 "surpass the others so much in charity, faith, chastity, prudence, and humility that she may be able to say with St. Paul, "Be imitators of me as I am of Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 4:16, or even with Jesus Christ Himself, "I have given you an example that what I do you also may do." John 13:15. St. Gertrude, St. Ethelreda, and many other abbesses who in all times were the glories of the Benedictine order, were superiors of this kind. By

their way of governing, patterned after the example of their divine Master, they sanctified themselves along with many others who followed in their steps. Thus should you be and I have confidence that you will be with the help of grace. Everything depends on divine grace and your own desire. Set generously to work on this noble plan and follow it faithfully, for the mercies of the Lord are not lessened nor are your obligations different from theirs, since you hold the same position.

Second Consideration

The Kind of Persons over Whom the Superior Is Placed

The divine Spouse has entrusted to you the care of His cherished spouses. It is the holy people of God that you are called to govern, to edify by your example, for whom you must answer to Him. This is a fresh motive which gives greater weight to your obligations. It is set before you in the Rule already quoted.

What respect, what tenderness you should have for souls so dear to Jesus Christ, for souls who have generously left all for His sake, whom He Himself has especially chosen and predestined to be vessels of election in which He will pour the riches of His grace, and who are the dearest part of His flock. Certainly it is a great honor to guide souls thus distinguished by divine choice", and Jesus Christ in calling you to this work has given you a magnificent pledge of His love. But remember that the greater the honor, the greater the responsibility. The more Jesus gives testimony of His love for you, the more He claims your love and fidelity. The loss of one of these He has entrusted to you will touch His heart more keenly than the loss of a hundred others whom He has not so favored, and He is more deeply wounded by the infidelities of this soul than by the crimes of several other persons. If the care of a single soul is so important, see what a burden you assumed the day you consented to take up the government of the community. What watchfulness, what mortification, what exceptional sanctity you pledged yourself to at that time.

Third Consideration

The Reason Why the Superior Is Placed over Others

This third consideration is not less weighty than the other two. The purpose for which you have been appointed is not merely to keep occasions of scandal and of serious sin away from your community. You must not be satisfied with some mediocre degree of virtue, without aiming at anything higher, or with preserving exterior regularity, which often fails to exclude serious interior faults. As the Rule clearly says, you are chosen superior "to make your daughters advance in virtue and to lead them to the complete observance of their holy Rules and Constitutions and to the very summit of

perfection as much by the example of your life and conduct as by the dignity and authority of your office." It is not mediocre perfection that Jesus Christ asks of His spouses. There is not one of them to whom He has not given a great abundance of grace, which, if carefully cultivated, will bear fruits of deep and solid piety. Each one made a decisive and generous step when she renounced all for the love of Jesus Christ. However, much still remains to be done. That step was only a first preparation, necessary to render them fit to receive greater gifts. In the religious state they must grow more and more in beauty and perfection in order to please the divine King to Whom they are consecrated. The religious state is like that part of the palace of Assuerus set aside for the young virgins who were aspiring to become queens, where everything was arranged to make them perfectly beautiful so that "during six months they anointed themselves with oil of myrrh, and during six more months they used perfumes and aromatic liquids." Esther 2:12

To put it another way, the religious state is the vestibule of heaven, where the precious stones chosen to be its most beautiful ornaments may be polished. It is your duty to adorn and make lovelier these heavenly brides, to polish continually these priceless stones.

You must be the model of those who should surpass all others in virtue. You must make still more brilliant the purity of those Who are already pure, and present them without spot or wrinkle to your Spouse. But what holiness this demands! If you are not already advanced in perfection, or at least tending towards it with all your power, how can you guide souls who are called to a high degree of virtue? If you try to do so, will you not have reason to fear the condemnation of Our Lord? "If the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch," Matt. 15:14 How can you pass on to others what you yourself lack? How can you speak of mortification if you seek your own ease? How can you speak of the interior life and of recollection if you yourself are taken up with trifles and do not know how to guard your senses and your tongue? This would only be to draw upon yourself the reproach which God makes to the sinner in the Psalms and (which is quoted in the Rule of St. Benedict) "Why do you speak of my justice, and why does your mouth proclaim allegiance to me?" Ps. 50:16

I have said enough to give you a correct idea of the duties devolving upon a Superior. This concept follows clearly from the three preceding considerations on the One Whom the Superior represents, on the dignity of those she governs and the purpose of her responsibility for governing them.

Take time to reflect on these points, and consider carefully the obligations which follow from them. What effect does this examination produce in you? It is impossible that it should cause any sentiment of vain complacency. I have no fear that any such thoughts will take possession of your mind. Now that you see the magnitude of the burden, its weight will make you insensible to any fascination that a position of preeminence could have. You will not be surprised by the great repugnance many saints have had for

any sort of office; you will share their feelings, and you will see clearly that it is much safer to obey than to command. You realize that some Superiors may be lost on account of their negligence and omissions in fulfilling these difficult duties, and you are almost ready to cry out in the bitterness of your soul. "If the burden of superiorship is so great, who can be saved if she has to carry it?" These fears are just, provided that they remain within bounds. One who does not fear the position of superior does not really understand what it entails. One who does not feel its burden must acknowledge that she is far from carrying out all its duties. It is certainly a very great burden, one under which the strongest and most prudent would give way if they were left to their own strength, their own prudence. However, though there is reason to fear, there is none to despair. On this point, I remind you of Our Lord's words: "It is impossible with man, but not with God, for everything is possible with God." Fear, then, because you are weak, but have confidence because God is strong. Let your confidence overcome your fears because His strength is greater than your weakness. Moreover, as long as you are distrustful of yourself and rely upon God, while neglecting nothing you are able to do, you may be sure of His help. He had pledged Himself to come to your assistance since He has called you to a responsibility so much beyond your own power. He Who has called you is faithful", says St. Paul. Thess. 10:24 And I add: He is full of love; He has given you a special mark of His love in confiding to you what He cherishes most; this same love will help you to carry your great responsibility. Enter fully into His loving plans for you; He is increasing your labor only to make your crown brighter. He has placed you in this position, so that you may give Him greater proofs of your zeal by endeavoring to promote His glory and to inspire many souls to fervor in His service.

If He asks much, it is because He wishes to give much. See in His hands the glorious crown He is preparing for you. "When the Prince of Pastors will appear," says St. Peter, "those who have the care of souls will receive a never-fading crown of glory." 1 Peter 5:4

This crown is wonderful; it is composed of as many jewels as there are souls who have been helped along the way of perfection through your teaching and example. Let the expectation of such a reward relieve your anxiety; let the remembrance of the love and the faithfulness of God moderate your fears. May a reasonable mingling of fear and trust always keep you on the alert and continually arouse your fervor. Fear will make you humbler and more prudent; it will incite you to pray always, according to the advice of Jesus Christ. Trust will give you courage and holy daring to overcome difficulties, and through it your prayer will be heard. Moved by fear, you will confess your misery and unworthiness. Then you will cry out with Moses: "Who am I to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?" [Exodus 3:11] to guide your chosen people in the path of virtue, and with the Apostles, "Lord, save us, we perish." Luke 8:24 But, animated by confidence, you will forget yourself and realize that you are strong with the strength of God. Like David you will not be afraid to encounter the boldest enemies, and you will

say with Isaias, "Lord, here I am, send me"

Is. 6:8 and with St. Paul, "I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me."

Heb. 4:13

The first and the main effect of these impressions should be to produce in you a firm resolution to perfect yourself in all virtues, especially in those which distinguish a good superior. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE VIRTUES WHICH DISTINGUISH A GOOD SUPERIOR

Since the Superior must train her daughters in every virtue, she herself must strive to be perfect in all virtues. Nevertheless, it is particularly necessary that a person having the responsibility for the care of souls should, if she is to fulfill her duty as God sees it, make her government both pleasing and helpful to her subjects. She must also avoid the dangers which surround her.

It is particularly of these virtues that I wish to speak now. Since you must model yourself after the pattern of Jesus Christ, Whose person you represent, I will remind you of some lessons in which He taught them. I will explain them as He expressed them Himself. If you study this divine Model and the examples He gave of the way to govern souls, you will be especially struck by five virtues which shine out in His whole conduct: charity, gentleness, humility, zeal, and prudence. If you examine further into the nature of these virtues, you will see how they harmonize with the purpose of spiritual authority.

Charity unites the Superior to God at the same time that it relieves and lightens her burden. Gentleness helps her to bear the defects of her subjects. Humility makes her yoke easy to support, even loveable. Zeal puts her charity in action. Prudence teaches her how to turn everything to the profit of her subjects, and her own, too. But each of these virtues should be considered in particular.

1 - **Charity**

Jesus showed us how much He wished this queen of virtues to rule the hearts of those who govern when, after His Resurrection, He asked St. Peter, "Simon, do you love me? Do you love me more than these?" John 21:15 This was His only question before He entrusted His flock to the Apostle. But Jesus teaches us this great lesson even more emphatically by His example. Charity is concerned with God and with our neighbor for the sake of God. Jesus lived only to love His Father. He had no desire except to inflame the hearts of all men with this love. "I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what do I desire but that it be enkindled." Luke 12:49 He sought only to do the will of His Father. His "meat" was to do that Will. He always did what was most agreeable to the Heavenly Father.

"I seek not my own glory," John 8:50 Our Lord said, "My meat is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish His work." John 4:34 "He Who sent Me is with Me, and I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." John 8:29 His love for men was full of tenderness, and often aroused feelings of the deepest compassion in Him. "Seeing the multitude" says the Evangelist, "He had compassion on them because they were afflicted and

lying as sheep without a shepherd." Matt. 9:36 This compassionate love made Him weep at the sight of ungrateful Jerusalem and made Him feel bitter grief over the loss of His traitorous disciple. It was this love which drew forth a bloody sweat from His sacred Body in the Garden of Olives at the remembrance of our sins.

This charity, this love of God and of souls, should be found in a Superior to a very high degree. It should be, as it were, a participation in the charity of Christ. It should be her distinctive virtue, the one from which all the others flow. Her heart should be burning with the love of God, for it is her duty to spread this divine fire and to enkindle it in others. She is, in some manner, a mediatrix between God and her sisters, to draw His blessings upon their heads and turn away His anger. According to the expression of a great saint, she must "carry the Community on her shoulders." All this requires that she should have great influence with God, and this influence is only granted to exceptional charity.

But, if the Superior must be powerful over the heart of God to obtain what is necessary for her subjects, she must be no less powerful over the souls of those entrusted to her in order to obtain all that God demands of them. She cannot expect this unless she is characterized by a great charity towards her neighbor. An ordinary charity is not enough; her love for her daughters must have a special character. It must be the love of a tender mother. This is the love which Jesus expressed when He addressed the guilty city in these touching words: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together your children as the hen gathers her chicks under her wings." Matt. 23:37 The Fathers say the Savior used this comparison because of the remarkable love and solicitude the hen shows towards her little ones. She is ready to defend them against any enemy, even at the risk of her life; she fears the least danger for them; she exhausts herself in care and vigilance. Night and day a mother is occupied with her child; she pays no attention to her own sufferings, and her love even makes these sufferings sweet. What nature does for the mother, grace must do, and do more perfectly, for the Superior. "If she loves as she should, she will do all, sacrifice all, and always count it as nothing." Cant. 8:7 See how far the love of Jesus goes: "The Good Shepherd give His life for His sheep." John 10:11 He carried out the lesson He taught us by these words in an inimitable way. What is still more, He is not satisfied to have poured out His blood in an excess of love, but He continues to give Himself in the Blessed Sacrament to be the food of His sheep.

Now if a Superior is bound to imitate this charity of Jesus Christ, if she must be ready to give her life for her flock, how can she refuse to give up lesser goods -- her own satisfaction, her talents, her rest, her health? It is not herself but God Whom she must love in her daughters. It is not for her own satisfaction, it is not for the sake of being considered a good Superior, that she must attract the affections of her daughters and show them how much she loves them. Such egotistical views do not enter into a heart well

established in charity. A heart patterned after the heart of Jesus does not seek its own glory, but only that of God. Nothing but the interests of God can touch such a heart. If it desires to be loved and if it wins the hearts of others by sincere marks of friendship, it does so to bring them to God and consecrate them to Him. A Superior loves herself, not God, when she shows preference for those who flatter her or for those whose only claim is some talent or some advantage of rank or fortune. Genuine charity knows nothing of such motives, it loves without distinction and for higher considerations, which are common to all. If it does make any distinction in its affection, it measures this distinction only by what makes a soul more pleasing to God. Even in this case, it is very reserved as to exterior demonstrations.

The Blessed Virgin certainly held the first place in the Heart of Our Lord, and no one else had such claims to His love. Still, throughout the Gospels, we can hardly find an instance where His infinite tenderness towards His Mother appears. At the same time we read that He welcomed publicans and sinners with such kindness that He was called their friend. In the same way, a Superior who is acting according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ will often show much greater tenderness towards one who is less deserving or towards one against whom she might feel some resentment on account of certain personal injuries.

The care of the soul is the first object of charity, but this virtue must not neglect the care of the body. Charity is moved to compassion by all the sufferings and afflictions of the neighbor. Sometimes those of the body are more keenly felt than those of the soul, although not at all comparable in importance to the latter. Furthermore, bodily infirmities often lead to those of the soul; besides, since man is naturally inclined towards the care of his body, he is often more touched by the services rendered to him in this line than by those more directly given to his soul. Hence to help the body is a useful means of doing something for the soul.

Jesus Christ strongly encourages us to devote ourselves to corporal works of mercy, since He mentions nothing else specifically in connection with the sentence He will pronounce on the Last Day. His conduct here is a lesson given particularly to Superiors.

Before we hear Him give the Sermon on the Mount, we see Him busy curing all kinds of bodily ailments. On another occasion, knowing that the people lacked the necessities of life, He told His disciples: "I have compassion on the multitude, for, behold, it is now three days that they have followed me, and they have nothing to eat." Mark 8:2 Twice He performed the great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Taught by these and many other examples of Our Lord's goodness, the saints have always had deep compassion for the sufferings of others and have done almost incredible things to relieve them. It is enough merely to open their lives, on each page we find proof of this compassion. A Superior who should have a mother's

tenderness, can hardly go too far in her care of the sick. She must carefully provide her daughters with everything necessary. She must even forestall their requests in case they might be ashamed to express them. It would be a serious defect to treat the sufferings of others as imaginary illnesses when she takes great care of herself on account of the slightest indisposition.

2. - Gentleness

This virtue is the first fruit of charity; it is absolutely necessary for a Superior. This gentleness is so dear to Jesus Christ that He has made it, along with humility, the distinctive mark, the virtue of His Heart. Although possessing likewise all the virtues in a supreme degree, He spoke only of these two as being particularly His own. And to show that it is especially as Superior and Master that He speaks, and hence that those who represent Him in this position must imitate Him particularly in these two virtues, He invites all men to come to Him and to listen to Him: "Come to Me, all you who are heavy laden ... Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." Matt. 11:28, 30 Then He immediately adds words which express the effect of this gentleness: "My yoke is sweet and my burden light."

Nothing seems hard, nothing is oppressive when the person who governs is loved and when the subjects know that they are loved by her. Gentleness wins the hearts of inferiors. It is the first science of those who govern, especially in religion where obedience should proceed from love. Gentleness is more irresistible than force; it subdues wills and leads them where it wishes. This power is one of the blessings promised to the meek in the words, "They shall possess the earth." Matt. 5:5 It is the gentleness of the superior that makes her daughters realize her love for them. This love may be sincere and ardent, it may desire every good for them, and nevertheless it maybe doubted and be powerless to serve and help if it is not truly gentle. If the Superior is somewhat severe in her manner of speaking, if she discourages those who come to her and does not listen to their difficulties, if the least fault arouses her displeasure, if, when she is obliged to reprove, she does not temper her severity with some mark of kindness -- all this shows too plainly the turmoil which she suffers interiorly; the hearts of her subjects are closed to her, and she can scarcely hope to be of any help to them.

Take great care to avoid these faults, and never forget that it is your duty to gain the affection and confidence of your subjects so far as you can in order that they may appeal to you as trustfully as children appeal to their mother. Always listen to them; you must know how to find time for this because it is an essential part of your duty. Speak to them with all possible tenderness, but let this tenderness appear even more in your expression and your manner of acting than in your words. Each one of the sisters should be convinced that there is no one whom you prefer to her, and that you look upon her as your best friend. However, you must not try to attain this by

being too indulgent. This would tend rather to cause disregard for authority than to inspire love. This latter can never be genuine unless it is based on esteem.

Be firm when the Rule requires it. To urge on, to reprove, to correct – nothing in this is contrary to gentleness, provided that you do it without passion and that your only motive is "to promote the spiritual good of your subjects", [Rule of St. Benedict, Statutes, 3, No. 5] as the Rule says. Your sisters will readily perceive this, and they will love and esteem you more on account of it. Always mingle your reprimands with something that may allay their bitterness and show that you really reprove through love. Imitate Jesus, Who, after He had reproached His apostles for their want of faith, calmed the waves and stretched out a helping hand to Peter, even while He reproached Him for his lack of faith. In the same way to the threats addressed to certain bishops of Asia in the Apocalypse, He always joined some promise to encourage them. Receive with great kindness those who acknowledge their faults, and never let anyone have reason to believe that you despair of her improvement.

Do not readily believe that any of the sisters is badly disposed towards you. Pay no attention to what is personal, and act in such a way that the one who has offended you will believe that you do not remember her offense -- unless, perhaps, it be to give her greater signs of affection. A Superior should be the more ready to forgive as she herself is liable to be mistaken or to fail. She must remember that if she is severe to little shortcomings that affect her and reproves on every occasion, she is pronouncing sentence against herself, for we read, 'With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.' Matt. 7:2 The prophet used these words quoted in the Gospel to express the great gentleness of Jesus Christ. "Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul has been well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him; and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not contend nor cry out; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not extinguish till he send forth judgment unto victory." Isaias 42:1-3, Matt. 12:18-20 You see here how pleasing gentleness is to God, how it draws down His Holy Spirit upon us and makes us fit to procure His glory; you see also to what degree it must rule and regulate the exterior and you learn how to make use of it with regard to the most desperate sinners. If your patience is tried, think of the happiness you may then give to God and remember the gentleness of Jesus Christ. See how He showed this meekness even towards His most stubborn enemies. Study especially how He practiced this virtue in dealing with His apostles, who were so ignorant and imperfect, while He Himself was filled with wisdom and holiness. He bore their imperfections, their faults, and their uncouthness with incredible patience. It would have been easy for Him to fill them from the very beginning with every kind of gift and holiness, as He did later after His ascension, but He did not wish to work this change during His life so that Superiors, especially, might find in Him a perfect

model of the gentleness they should practice in their office. Let your own patience be as constant as it is generous. Even if you have to deal with a person who seems to be doing her best to exasperate you, cast a glance at Jesus betrayed by Judas. See how long Jesus bore with him, see how, on the very night when the traitor carried out his treason, Our Lord washed his feet, embraced him, and made a last appeal of grace by giving him the tender name of friend, "Friend, why have you come?" Matt. 26:50

3. - Humility

"He who is the greatest among you shall be your servant. Matt. 23:11 "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them: and they who have power over them are called beneficent." Luke 22:25 But he who is the greater among you, become as the younger, and he who is the leader, as he that serves." "I am in the midst of you as he who serves."! Luke 22:27 By these words Our Lord made clear the essential difference between superiors in the civil order and those in the religious order. In these latter He desires the greatest humility, and His example gives added force to this obligation. Civil authority often needs a certain exterior pomp to maintain its prestige and gain respect, because having exterior goods as its principal end and aim, it could not be upheld without their means. On the contrary, religious superiors, whose authority rests solely on God and whose aim is the spiritual good of their subjects, hardly need any other than spiritual means to make themselves respected and obeyed.

Our Lord's words are enough to prove this. He orders Superiors to be as servants and as the least of all. This, then, is a suitable, rather the most suitable, means of establishing and maintaining their authority. This argument is conclusive; those which proceed from the example of our Divine Master are not less weighty. As sovereign Lord of all, He had a right to the respect and submission, not of some, but of all men throughout the whole world and through the centuries. His authority had to be firmly established and well maintained. With this end in view, what did He do? He chose for Himself the greatest humiliations. He wished to have a poor mother. He was born in a stable, lay in a manger, and went through all the stages of infancy. The greater part of His earthly life was passed in obscurity and in manual labor. But, to speak particularly of His public life, we see Him in the midst of His disciples as One Who serves, even during the course of His preaching and His miracles. Hence we may infer that it was not only on the eve of His passion, when He washed the feet of His apostles, that He practiced such acts of humility towards them. At least, it is certain that He did not distinguish Himself from them in any way. He shared the same food, He went about on foot as they did, and He conversed familiarly with them, as with equals and friends.

I do not know what reasons Superiors could advance for not conforming to this divine example, which they should consider as given especially for them in the person of the Apostles. "Now I exhort you," said St. Peter to those entrusted with the care of souls, "I, your fellow presbyter and witness to the

sufferings of Christ, the partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed in time to come, tend the flock of God confided to you --- nor yet as lording it over your charges but being made a pattern of the flock from the heart." 1Peter 5:1-3. They are not lords and masters, but fathers and teachers; their inferiors are not so much their subjects as their children and disciples. Superiors must train these subjects in all the virtues; what better means can be found than to practice humility themselves? Again, this method was consecrated by the example of Jesus Christ Himself, He chose it as the gentlest and most effective way to persuade His followers of the necessity of humility and to make this knowledge penetrate their hearts.

Here an objection naturally arises in your mind, for the best bishops and other dignitaries of the Church are distinguished by some exterior grandeur and a certain amount of pomp. This will seem a little strange if it is not a means of maintaining their position, and might appear little in conformity with the teaching and example of Our Lord. Nevertheless, it is easy to reconcile this conduct with what has just been said, provided we keep in mind that Christian princes have prudently judged that it befitted their honor to give some lustre to the ecclesiastical dignity and to connect it with a high rank in the civil order, a rank which, as we have seen, needs a certain ceremoniousness. As a matter of fact, this adds no weight to their teaching, and even, though without cause, becomes for some an opportunity for discrediting evangelical morality or an excuse for not following it. Holy bishops have always sighed over the necessity which took away some of their conformity with Jesus Christ and have tried to avoid, as far as possible, what they looked upon as an obstacle to spiritual progress. Be grateful to God that you are not hindered by these same difficulties in the discharge of your duties and that you meet with nothing which prevents you from giving full attention to the spiritual progress of your sisters and that you have a free hand in the practice of humility.

Therefore, be humble, both exteriorly and interiorly. Be humble in your thoughts by a low opinion of yourself, of your talents and virtues. This is the basis of genuine humility. It is not very difficult if you know God and know yourself, if you return to God what belongs to Him - i.e. every good, no matter what, - and keep for yourself what is your own, i.e. all kinds of faults and imperfections. This humility will teach you not to prefer yourself to anyone. You will not think that your authority is due to your merits and that you fulfill its responsibilities better than another would. Quite the contrary, you should be astonished that God could have chosen so unworthy and incapable person for this position. Then God Who resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble, will shed abundant blessings upon you.

Be humble in your affections. Do not desire to be esteemed more highly than you are; since you know that you are nothingness, do not desire to pass for something. Nevertheless, this need not keep you from acting so as to give edification or from doing what might give rise to a good opinion of you, because it is your duty to show others by your example the way in

which they should advance. It will not be your own glory which you are seeking but that of God, without attributing any good to yourself. Do not even have a too enthusiastic desire for great perfection for very often pride is mixed with such a desire. It is not the right way to make progress. On the road of perfection we go up only by going down. This is the true path traced by Jesus Christ, the path of which the Apostle writes: "Now that he ascended, what is it but because He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" Ephes. 4:9 Love the humiliations and the contempt which are due you. Nevertheless do nothing which deserves them or which you can foresee may occasion them. This is what St. Paul recommends to Timothy: "Let no man despise your youth". 1Tim. 4:12 But if you meet with contempt, if your actions are misunderstood, if your words are taken in a wrong sense, if your prudence is put in doubt by some failure, even if your faults have become apparent, rejoice at the abjection which comes to you from all this, while at the same time you regret whatever fault you may have committed. By this means the fault itself will turn to your profit, and God, Who is full of mercy, will put a stop to its disastrous consequences.

Humility of heart and of affection will produce great peace and great courage on all occasions, because you will not fear anything except displeasing God.

Be humble in your words. Never praise the good you have done; it is enough that God has seen it. You should desire, rather, that it be effaced from your recollection and that of others. I say the same thing about all that men are accustomed to esteem.

Let a Superior use her authority with reserve and only when circumstances require it. Avoid still more, harsh words, which aggravate the evil instead of curing it. Let your manner of speaking show the respect you have for your sisters. Do not be afraid to ask advice or to acknowledge your faults. Humility of words helps very much to maintain harmony among the members of a community. There is nothing better to ease the yoke of obedience.

Be humble in your actions. Have as little as possible in the way of special attention, and do not ask others to do anything for you which it would be suitable for you to do for yourself. Your companions are not your servants, but your sisters and spouses of the same King. Do not be above devoting yourself to the ordinary tasks of others. When possible, make it your joy to perform, from time to time, the lowliest household duties. Do this especially for the sick and the old, occasionally waiting on them yourself. Such was the custom of the saints, even those who were reigning monarchs. Since we aspire to the same destiny, let us follow the same path. In the religious life humility of action helps to give edification more than does anything else. When this example comes from the Superior, it influences the whole community and spreads fervor among them.

Be humble in your whole exterior. There is a certain bearing which shows

that a person is proud; this prejudices souls and turns them away from her. It appears in her glance, her movements, her posture; everything about her bears a stamp of haughtiness which seems to express her disdain for others and her high opinion of herself. There is, on the other hand, an exterior manner suited to the humble soul, all is modesty and simplicity in her. It is easy to see that such a person thinks more of others than of herself. She avoids both rudeness and affected politeness. The latter is all on the surface, while the attitude of which we speak comes from the feelings of the heart. Try to make yourself just such a person, and avoid everything that suggests pride. This humility depicted on the exterior is a powerful means of attracting those under you; it will open and expand their souls.

You need not be afraid of carrying genuine humility too far, nor of making your authority less respected by such conduct. God has promised to exalt the humble. God, Who loves the humble and disposes as He pleases of the hearts of men, will incline towards the one who, for love of Him, takes the last place and yields to everyone. Those very persons who know best from their own experience how natural pride is to man will appreciate a virtue whose difficulty they understand. Finally, as it is God, and not man, Whom religious should obey, the more they perceive their Superior to be led by the spirit of God and of Jesus Christ, who has humility as her stamp, the more readily will they submit to her authority.

4. - Zeal

Jesus teaches us throughout the Gospels how essential the virtue of zeal is for Superiors and what qualities it should have.

What a touching picture of zeal full of solicitude He paints when He shows us Himself as the Good Shepherd who went tirelessly after the lost sheep and brought it home on His shoulders. Another time He compares Himself to the woman who could not rest until she had swept her whole house and found her lost drachma.

He gave us an example of strong and fearless zeal when He made a whip out of little cords and drove out those who were trafficking in the Temple. In this instance we should also notice how His severity was tempered by gentleness, for it would have been as easy for Jesus Christ to make thunderbolts fall on those who were violating the sanctity of His Father's house as it was simply to use little cords. We find the same characteristics in the way He reproached the Pharisees for their vices and unmasked their hypocrisy and warned the rich of the anger of God, while He promised blessings to the poor.

Furthermore, Our Lord's zeal was affable; see how even the little children had free access to His presence. His zeal was universal; all were invited to come to Him, rich and poor, great and lowly. The learned and the ignorant were both objects of His solicitude. His zeal was constant. Jesus never

ceased to exhort, to warn, to promise, to do every kind of good, and to use all possible means to win hearts to God. It was fervent according to the burning words: "The zeal of Your house has consumed me." John 2:17 It was a patient zeal, for He bore all sorts of injuries without ever seeking revenge. He even reproved two of His dearest disciples because their zeal for His glory was ill-regulated. "You do not know of what manner of spirit you are, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He always kept this aim in view; it regulated His whole conduct. The Apostles especially were never without tender proofs of His zeal. Everywhere and on every occasion He was pre-occupied with drawing them to virtue and perfection. By His lessons He kept warning them against vices, uncovering the disorderly inclinations still alive in their hearts, consoling them in their sorrows, and strengthening them for future conflicts.

To imitate this zeal of Jesus Christ is part of the essential duty of a Superior, since the Lord wishes to make her share in His action on souls. Only such zeal can give her the vigor necessary to support the interests of God and to halt the effects of that spirit of nature which is always tending to relax discipline.

This zeal is like "the leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened." Matt. 13:33 Be like this wise and prudent woman; let zeal flame up in your heart, let it animate all your thoughts, words, and actions. Spread it to all around you. Then you will be pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, like the valiant woman of whom the Book of Proverbs speaks: "The heart of her husband trusts in her, he shall have no need of spoils." Proverbs 31:11 Jesus Christ has entrusted the care of His spouses to you; it is your duty to guard them for Him so that they will be a glorious testimony to the victory He has gained over the world and the devil. "She will render him good and not evil all the days of her life", continues the Holy Book. Try to make yourself dearer every day to your heavenly Spouse by your good works. "She has bought wool and flax; and has wrought by the counsel of her hands." Do not let idleness and negligence creep into your life; at every moment zeal will show you something to do for the good of your subjects and your own. "She is like the merchant's ship, she brings her bread from afar." One of the occupations that zeal will suggest is to enrich your mind with helpful instructions which you will share later on with others as the bread of life. This bread must come "from afar" - not from earth, but from heaven; you will find it especially in prayer, in your communications with God. Furthermore, you must have it "in abundance", as a vessel is loaded with riches. "And she has risen in the night, and given a prey to her household and victuals to her maidens." Night is the time of rest, but also of darkness and deception. Even when the others are at ease, zeal should keep you vigilant, lest tranquility and darkness might give occasion for some temptation from that enemy who is always looking for a chance to do harm. It is also especially in times of quiet that you must give spiritual and substantial bread to souls. "She has considered a field and bought it; with

the fruit of her hands she has planted a vineyard."

Perfection is a vast field which must be cultivated by much prayer and work the more you consider its beauty, the more eager you will be to obtain it for yourself and your sisters. The house formed by your example and your teaching will be like a fertile vineyard, diligently cultivated, which will bear delightful fruit. "She has girded her loins with strength, and has strengthened her arm." Here, under the figurative language of Holy Scripture, we note the principal means of buying this field. To gird the loins with strengths to arm yourself by the practice of mortification, which subdues and governs the passions. To strengthen your arm is to take up and zealously carry out all sorts of good works.

I will not pursue this explanation any further. You can easily develop it for yourself. What follows in the holy text shows the reward promised to this zeal and its advantages for you and your subjects. "She shall not fear for her house in the cold of snow: for all her domestics are clothed with double garments." Proverbs 31:21

Your teaching and your example, your prayers and watchfulness, will be the safeguard of your sisters in difficult or dangerous circumstances; they will be burning with a zeal like your own. As for you, "strength and beauty will be your clothing, and you shall laugh in the latter day." Numerous good works and heroic actions, the fruit of your zeal, will clothe you with grace and adorn you magnificently. A sweet trust will pour joy into your soul, and the Divine Spouse, Whose honor you have supported and whose glory you have procured, will take care of yours; He will make that hour, which is so terrible for many, the beginning of your happiness.

Consider earnestly that, if there is any one in the world who is bound to imitate this portrait of the valiant woman traced out by the Holy Spirit, it is the Superior charged with the care of souls, it is you yourself. It is true that everywoman at the head of a family can, and ought, to look on this portrait as a model proposed for her imitation, but I insist that your obligation in this matter is much greater than hers. I say further that your zeal must not be less than that of those who have a greater number of souls to govern. It is true that your flock is small, but it is so precious in the sight of God and it must advance towards such high perfection that no care can be too great. Furthermore, this is your personal responsibility. It is impossible for you to lean on others with any security, for you will have to answer for any good neglected in the community because of your want of care or for any evil which your zeal did not prevent as it should have done. I know that a Superior who loves repose, one whose zeal is weak and whose ideas of perfection are not very lofty, will be easily satisfied. Provided that exterior regularity is maintained and there is no discord in the house, she will not take much trouble to aim higher. But such is not the case with a Superior inspired by genuine zeal; she knows that even in the best soil harmful weeds are always springing up which will spoil everything if no care is taken to root

them out. For this reason she is always on guard. If some disagreement arises, if there is any particular connection which might wound charity, if an irregularity creeps in here or there, if the rule of silence begins to be neglected, or if religious exercises are less carefully performed, if there is too much freedom in contacts with the world leading to useless conversations, and loss of time, the vigilant Superior hastens to remedy matters by wholesome warnings or by a suitable severity before the evil has taken root and become strengthened by habit.

She is as careful of the particular good of each member as she is of the general welfare. If she sees that one of her daughters is sad and discouraged, tormented by scruples and anxieties, or beginning to fall from her first fervor and no longer showing the same exterior modesty, the Superior's motherly zeal is aroused, and she does not delay in checking the evil. She uses gentleness, exhortations, authority, everything she can, to cure the evil or, at least to keep it from spreading.

See how fruitful this zeal is. Each one is fulfilling her duties, and there is no visible irregularity or notable abuse. Does this satisfy the Superior? Certainly not; it is her ambition to plant and to cultivate in the hearts of all the virtues necessary for perfection -- the spirit of prayer, recollection, and mortification. The Superior must try continually to inculcate the practice of these virtues, first of all by her example, but also by her instructions, in private and in general. She will show beginners how sweet the yoke of Jesus Christ is when it is embraced generously and without reserve. To those who are more advanced, she will teach love of the cross, of humiliations and contempt. Sometimes she will remind her sisters of the motives for fear, but more frequently she will try to open hearts by dwelling on the motives for love. She will give a high idea of the perfection to which God invites them, and, so far as depends on her she will inspire in them an ardent desire of attaining it. "She has no greater grace than this, to hear that her children walk in truth." 3John 1:4 She looks upon her children as her glory, and, if one of them surpasses her, this only increases her joy. Far from discouraging their fervor, she enters into God's designs for each one of them. She grants each what the spirit of God asks of them and what their spiritual father approves, either as to prayer or mortification. She desires the progress of her sisters as much as she desires her own, because God is equally glorified by both.

Her zeal becomes more ardent during her frequent intercourse with God, and she speaks with Him about the needs of the souls He has entrusted to her. She speaks to Him of all in general and of each one in particular. Through this constant intimacy with God she receives light to help them, and she learns the best way of exercising her zeal. Sometimes God will inspire her with some new means of awakening the fervor that a certain routine might tend to diminish, and she corresponds faithfully to these holy inspirations. She is careful to maintain and develop in her community those solid devotions which are such a great help to perfection, for instance,

devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Most Holy Virgin, but above all the frequent and fervent reception of the sacraments.

It is easy to see that in the midst of so many claims on her devotedness, a really zealous Superior can never be idle.

5. - Prudence

The zeal of a Superior must always be joined with prudence; otherwise it can become, not merely fruitless, but dangerous and harmful. Jesus Christ tells us both how necessary this virtue is for those who govern and how rare it is when He said, "Who, then is the faithful and wise steward, one whom his master sets over his family to give them their measure of wheat in due season? " Luke 12:42 These same words show what it is that distinguishes the prudent servant: namely, to give each one of those in his care "his measure", that is, what is beneficial for him, in proper proportion and at a favorable time. Prudence, then, considers the thing itself, the person, and the occasion. We learn this same lesson from the example of the Savior when He replied to those who asked Him why His disciples did not fast: "no man sews a piece of raw cloth on an old garment; otherwise, the new piecing takes away from the old, and there is made a greater rent; and no man puts new wine into old bottles; otherwise the wine will burst the bottles, and both the wine will be spilt and the bottles will be lost. But new wine must be put into new bottles." Mark 2:21-22 The Apostles and the disciples were still weak and needed great indulgence; to have asked too much of them then would have caused their spiritual destruction. But later on, when they had been renewed by the Holy Spirit, they would become capable of the most difficult things, and then they would profit by them. Jesus always observed this rule of prudence in dealing with His Apostles. He did not speak of what He was to suffer nor of the trials they themselves would have to endure until after He had been with them a long time and strengthened them by His miracles and teaching. Even then there were some things He could not show them plainly, "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now." John 16:12

A prudent superior must note the virtues, the talents, and the characteristics of each of her subjects, and then act accordingly. Without attention to all this, she is likely to place some of her subjects in employments very prejudicial to their spiritual welfare, and even to that of the community.

Every one cannot be treated in the same way; even the same person must be handled differently on different occasions. A premature warning may not achieve its purpose, while, if it had been given a little later, it might have had the desired effect. With some, severity may be useful and gentleness with others, but a superior should rarely use the one without mingling with it something of the other. Gentleness wins hearts. Severity is useful to accustom subjects to put up with contradictions and not to follow their own

will. It is only prudence that can guide the Superior in the measure that is to be observed. It will teach her how to be gentle and mild without lessening her authority, severe without alienating the affection of her subjects. It will make her careful without making her worried; it will show her how to be vigilant without tiring others or disturbing her own peace. It will teach her how to take care of temporal affairs while keeping her chief attention on spiritual matters. It will lead her not to think evil of anyone, but also not to be too trusting. Prudence will also show her how to leave to her subordinates the duties of their positions while making it clear that, if they fail in these duties, she will notice the fact. Finally, prudence will incline the Superior to shut her eyes to certain faults and correct others, to be sometimes more liberal, sometimes more exacting in her way of granting permissions.

It is also an important part of prudence to know, not only what to say and how to say it, but also what to be silent about. St. James, after turning us away from any desire to superiority by the picture of severer judgment consequent upon it, speaks immediately afterwards about the evils which come from the tongue as those against which Superiors must be most on guard. He says, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man; every nature of beast is tamed by the nature of man but the tongue no man can tame, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison." James 3:2, 7-8 Nevertheless, perfection in word is necessary for a superior. She must be mistress of this tongue, which is so hard to govern. An imprudent word, a word which indicates the least contempt for a subject, an allusion to some confidence entrusted to her, an expression which shows a preference or betrays a dislike, a word of vanity, impatience, softness, or immortification -- any one of these is enough to do great harm if it comes from a superior. It is enough to damage her reputation, to diminish or destroy the affection of her subjects, to close their hearts and make them withdraw their confidence. It may leave an impression that can never entirely be effaced and which may hinder the good effect of her example and instruction.

All this shows clearly the importance of the advice given by Our Savior, especially for superiors, in the person of the Apostles. "Be you therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves." Matt. 10:16 Perhaps the simplicity of a dove would be enough for a subject because the prudence of the Superior would supply what was lacking. But it is entirely different in your case, for you are obliged to be prudent even for the others. In you, this virtue cannot be made up for by any other quality, no matter what, not even by great virtue and talents with which you might be endowed along other lines. Nevertheless you must not be too much discouraged by what you lack on this point. Listen to the encouraging words of St. James, "But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God Who gives to all men abundantly and reproaches not. And it shall be given him." James 1:5 This is the wisdom that Solomon wished for and obtained, for, as Scripture says, his request was pleasing to God. Yours will not be less pleasing to Him, and He will be ready to grant your prayer, for wisdom is a necessary for the care of souls as for

the government of a Kingdom.

I will not insist further here on the means for obtaining this virtue nor those of which I spoke previously, for these means will be the topic of the chapter which is to follow.

CHAPTER III

MEANS A SUPERIOR SHOULD USE TO ACQUIRE THE VIRTUES NECESSARY FOR HER

The means I propose to you here are not different from those which help in the acquisition of any virtue, but I will make a special application to your responsibility and to the virtues which it demands. Let us reduce these to four.

Reflection, Practice, Prayer, Recollection.

I will speak in turn about each of these points.

I. REFLECTION

It is unnecessary to prove how essential this means is for the acquisition of any virtue. It is evident that from reflection comes the knowledge of the excellence and necessity, as well as the special means to use in order to possess it.

Therefore, I will present some general and particular considerations of a nature to arouse a desire for the virtues of which we have been speaking and which will prove helpful in acquiring them. The last chapter was enough to show their importance. The conclusion we now draw is that you will not work effectively towards your own perfection unless you practice them, for the perfection of any one is relative to the state to which he has been called and consists in practicing the virtues proper to it. Besides, as perfection is the more necessary in proportion as it procures greater benefits for us, so also its lack is followed by graver consequences.

Reflect on all that depends on your perfection. What a serious obligation this lays upon you to practice the virtues of your position! Reflect that the good or bad effect of your government may continue far beyond your lifetime, that the desire of perfection and the spirit of fervor penetrates the hearts of those who live with you and will communicate itself in turn to those who follow them, and thus this influence will extend far into the future. On the other hand if you permit tepidity and carelessness to become established, it will be very difficult to undo their effects, and it is much to be feared that this evil will get the upper hand and increase with time. It is hardly possible for the virtue or the bad conduct of a religious to affect herself without having any influence on others. How much more is this so in the case of a Superior! Her example is always followed by the greater number. If she is full of zeal and fervor, her subjects will be so, too; if she is tepid and careless, the Community will be influenced accordingly. In view of these consequences, you may judge how great the punishment or how beautiful the reward of a Superior will be.

The Superior is the head, and through her God wishes to extend His bless-

ings to all the members. If the head is well disposed to receive these blessings, they will be given richly and abundantly. Otherwise, they will be fewer, and the divine treasures will be, as it were, closed up. This conduct of Providence has something incomprehensible about it, but experience proves its reality. So when a house seems, as it were, abandoned, when grace no longer flows upon it abundantly, when it seems about to fail because of lack of subjects, the Superior has good reason to fear lest this should have come about to a large extent, through her fault. She can say that, if she had had more of the genuine holiness that comes from on high and less of the prudence of the flesh, more of the spirit of her vocation, which is that of Jesus Christ, and less of the spirit of the world, piety would be flourishing among her subjects, God would be prodigal of His favors, and since her first care would be to "seek the kingdom of God, all the rest would have been added to her", according to His Words. Matt. 6:33

I will not repeat here what I said at the beginning about the nature of your responsibility, the One Whom you represent, about the rank of those whom you govern, the purpose for which you govern them, and the feelings which all these considerations should arouse in you. I will not repeat how seriously you are bound to practice the virtues proper to your position, but I must not fail to place before you some considerations of a more practical order. The first, which are general, will not fail, if often put before you, to awaken your fervor and increase your zeal. However, if this remains without definite aim, it may not produce any great effect. To meet this difficulty it is well to add other considerations which enter more into detail and bear more directly on the practical. Accordingly, I will be specific and give examples bearing upon each one of the virtues already offered for your meditation.

1. - First, with regard to charity, examine whether God is indeed the real and only Master of your heart. You can judge of this by your diverse feelings of joy or sadness, your desire or fear. See whether your thoughts naturally turn towards Him, if in all things it is His glory which comes to your mind and makes the strongest impression upon it, if there is anything you are not ready to sacrifice for Him, health, honor, employment, etc., if there is any cross which you would not willingly embrace in order to be conformed to His Holy Will.

With regard to charity towards the neighbor, consider whether all your subjects are equally dear to you, and if you have no preference for those who are more in accord with your disposition and character, even though they are less fervent and regular. See if you rejoice over the progress of each one as if it were your own, without any regret or hidden vexation at seeing them perhaps more advanced than you are, more devoted to prayer and mortification. See whether you are sincerely moved by everything that concerns them, sensitive to all their troubles of soul or body, really sharing their sufferings. Examine whether you place burdens on your subjects which you would not willingly carry yourself, and if you have a special tenderness

for the sick and the weak, providing them with all the help that you can.

2. - With regard to gentleness, descend into the depths of your heart and see if you hold any resentment which shows itself on occasion and leads you to treat one with more severity than another. See if you give any one reasonable cause for complaint by speaking too harshly or by an attitude that is somewhat haughty. Examine if you do not speak sometimes from an impulse of passion, whether you observe moderation in your reproofs and corrections, always keeping in mind the spiritual good of the person concerned. Does your manner on such occasions show that you are going against your inclination and that your severity does not come from any want of affection but solely from your zeal for good? Finally, consider whether offenses against you arouse your compassion for the one who is guilty and your desire to help her rather than any feeling of vexation.

3. - As to what concerns humility, consider whether your position as superior does not give you occasion for some complacency and make you think that you surpass others in talent and virtue, as well as in dignity. Examine whether you make your pre-eminence felt too much by some affectation in manner, language, or looks. Do you, for example, have the habit of coming in last when the whole community is assembled, as if to make the others wait for you? Do you, in your private capacity, ask for more attentions than necessary, or do you receive and ask services as if they were your due, and not acts of charity which your sisters in Jesus Christ render to you for love of Him? Then some motive of necessity, edification, or charity calls you, are you as prompt in fulfilling lowly duties as the others are? Finally, reflect whether you look upon yourself as the servant of all according to the maxims and example of your divine Master.

4. - In regard to zeal, ask yourself if there is anything about you of a nature to dis-edify your subjects or to lessen among them the religious spirit -- the spirit of poverty, mortification, silence, and recollection. Examine if you have allowed any disorder or irregularity to take root or gain ground, and if there is anything more you should do to increase fervor and the desire of perfection among your daughters. See if you understand them all. Have you taken pains to gain their confidence? Consider whether there is any one whom you have neglected to watch over. Consider too, whether you have exercised your vigilance too anxiously, thus wearying others and disturbing yourself. See if there is any soul in temptation that you ought to help, any one in suffering that you could console. Do you remember them all constantly in your prayers and communications with God, carefully recommending all their needs to Him?

5. - In relation to prudence take account of yourself and see if you are not too hasty and precipitate in your answers and your actions, especially when you are giving orders, which is something that should not be done without mature reflection and attention to all the circumstances concerning the matter itself, the time, the place, and the person involved. See, moreover,

whether you turn to God before you give a command in order to know His Will and to act in dependence on Him. Do you consult pious and experienced persons before you make decisions of some importance? Examine whether you are willing to receive suggestions, even from those under you, and whether you give attention to complaints made against you and take account of them insofar as they are well-founded. Examine also whether you are careful not to believe too easily complaints about others, suspending your judgment until you have examined such remarks with considerable care. See whether you ask too much of those who are weak and feeble, giving them trials which they are not yet ready to bear.

These considerations are sufficient. But you should repeat them, not all at once, but sometimes one virtue, sometimes another, according to what is more useful to you personally. I do not see how anyone could devote herself for some time to these reflections without drawing considerable profit from them and making notable progress in the virtues which are their object. However, this pre-supposes that they are joined with the considerations, for these latter tend directly to the practice of the virtue; the two are, as it were, inseparable.

2. PRACTICE OR EXERCISE OF THESE VIRTUES

There remains little to say on this subject. It is clear that, since perfection is a matter of practice rather than of speculation, we cannot be satisfied with mere considerations, but must go on to their effects and earnestly take the work in hand. Virtues are not acquired without repeated acts, just as is the case with any art or science. The manner of putting this into practice may be easily deduced from the preceding considerations. We must correct the faults they have helped us recognize in ourselves, we must aim generously toward the good they have put before us, and never give up that pursuit until we have attained our goal. When some occasion to practice one or another of these virtues presents itself, we must be very faithful. If such exterior occasions are rare, we must make interior acts. This is always possible, and it helps very much to keep alive the desire of these virtues, as well as to hold us ready to make exterior acts when circumstances permit.

Thus, to practice charity, if there is something that divides your heart, fills your mind during the day, and even pursues you during the time of prayer, make a complete sacrifice of it to God; renounce it actually if possible; otherwise do so interiorly as perfectly as possible, and persevere until the thing is removed from your thoughts and affections, or at least until you have become so indifferent to it that it no longer distracts you from God. If you have any fear or desire apart from God, offer yourself to suffer what you dread or to be deprived of what you wish for, and keep this up until your will is so conformed to God's that your only fear is to displease Him and your only desire to love Him above all things. If you experience any coldness towards someone, you should not be satisfied with merely not consenting to this feeling, but look for occasions to give this person sincere

evidences of your charity. Never fail to render to your subjects all the kindly services they can expect of you, and do this with maternal affection. In order to acquire gentleness, repress as soon as possible any contrary impulses that may arise. Never try to justify these impulses to yourself or others by throwing the blame on someone else. If someone has irritated you, you are not therefore excused for yielding to provocation. If a person has something against you, and not without reason, do not be ashamed to acknowledge your fault. Even if there is no fault on your part, be the first to give the example, because you are the Superior. According to the counsel of Jesus Christ, leaving your gift before the altar, go and try to calm your sister's troubled mind. This act of gentleness will gain her heart for God and put a glorious pearl in your crown.

If you desire to have humility reign within you, take care to get rid of anything in your exterior, your manners, or your language, which has a touch of pride. Remember that all the marks of honor given you are addressed to Jesus Christ and should cause you confusion rather than satisfaction. Let it be very clear that you sincerely consider yourself the last of all, and, so far as you can, always be the first to devote yourself to those occupations which offer the best chance of practicing humility. This is the way the saints took care to maintain their position when they were superiors. That is their real secret of inspiring respect and veneration in all.

To practice genuine zeal, begin by obeying all your particular Rules to the last iota. Be the first at all the community exercises. Work at reforming everything in yourself that needs reformation. Then do not spare exhortations and admonitions, full of charity, in general or individually. Since these are strengthened by your example they will carry great weight. Prevent abuses as soon as you notice them. Be careful to maintain the holy customs of the community and to promote the most suitable means for increasing fervor.

In order to train yourself to prudence, make serious efforts to understand and become familiar with the rules for the discernment of spirits traced out by St. Ignatius. Do the same with regard to his method for making a good election, and be careful to use them when there is occasion. Observe the precept of St. James: "Be swift to hear, but slow to speak and slow to anger." James 1:19 Ponder all things and accept the advice of wise persons. Recognize what your natural tendencies are, and carefully note your faults in order to avoid them. I will not enter into further details but go on to the third means which is prayer.

3. PRAYER

"Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watches in vain who keeps it. It is vain for you to rise before light." Psalms 127:1 The considerations, the practice of virtues, have been recommended to you, and you can hardly make too much use of these

means, for God helps those who do their part as well as they can. However, you must use these means without putting your confidence in them, but expect everything from the divine mercy. That the prophet King said about the building of a house and about the custody of a city is no less true when applied to a spiritual edifice, to the care of souls. Our own resources amount to nothing in the face of such a task. It is from God we must expect strength and light. It would be useless to bestir ourselves to act without Him. It is your duty to build a dwelling place worthy of God in the souls of all those who depend on you, and to watch over your community as over a citadel constantly exposed to the assaults of the enemy. You must, therefore, earnestly ask help from on high. Your prayer will serve as a rampart, everything will be granted to it, if it is humble, fervent, and persevering.

Your prayer will have the first quality if you know yourself and have a low opinion of your ability, for then you will cry to God from the bottom of your heart. You will acknowledge your misery at His feet, that unless He looks upon you with a merciful eye and extends a helping hand, you will sink beneath the weight of your responsibilities and be lost, along with many souls who are dear to him. Then you will say with David, "Lord, You took me from the flocks of sheep... to feed Jacob your servant and Israel your inheritance." Psalm 78:70-71 I was in a very imperfect state and still given up to my own inclinations and to earthly thoughts when you entrusted me with the care of your servants as a precious heritage. What will become of them and of me if you are not pleased to satisfy for my incapacity, which is well known to you, and to act as their Pastor and Guide yourself.

The second quality of your prayer should be fervor. This is necessary because of the grandeur of the things you have to ask. It will flow naturally from an ardent desire for these things and a tranquil confidence that God will be pleased with such a request and grant it. You will implore Him to inflame your love for 'Him and for your neighbor, to make you like Jesus "meek and humble of heart." You will ask Him to communicate His zeal to you, and at the same time give you a prudence suited to the responsibility He has entrusted to you. All this is very great, and it should be enough to raise you to high sanctity. Hence you must ask for it with great fervor. It is God's Will that you desire this, since He has chosen you for a position which makes these qualities necessary. Therefore, your prayer will not displease Him. The greater the gift, the more worthy it is of him Who grants it. You must not doubt that fervent supplication will obtain this grace. You may pray in this way: "O all powerful and merciful God, the grace I beg for is very great, but it is by that very fact more worthy of You. It is very necessary for me, and You Yourself, Lord, will that I desire it ardently and implore You to grant it. Nothing else can please You more or be more useful to me. Concern for Your own glory and the good of souls who are dear to You urge you to grant it to me. How then could I not beg for it ardently? Grant me, Lord, through Your infinite mercy that which I am unworthy to obtain but which it is worthy of you to effect. I beg this of You with all the

fervor of which I am capable, and, if my devotion is still too weak, deign to increase it by Your grace and make it such that my prayer may be answered."

To fervor in your prayer you must add constancy and perseverance. Your necessities are continual, and your prayer must be so, too. Even though we have no one to answer for but ourselves, our prayer should be uninterrupted, because there is not a moment when we do not need help and our enemy never sleeps. With what incessant ardor then should one who is obliged to watch over other souls as well as his own keep calling for God's help. He is like a shepherd who must lead his master's sheep through an unknown country in the dangerous darkness of the night, knowing that his master will demand a strict account of the flock.

Each one of your subjects must be as dear to you as an only child is to the loving mother who carries him in her arms. If she has no food to give the child, do you think she can rest before she finds some? So a Superior should, so to speak, carry her whole community in her arms and never cease imploring our Heavenly Father to give each one the necessary nourishment since she is too poor to procure it herself.

Often ask, both for yourself and your sisters, those virtues which you will never possess to a sufficient degree, and often repeat such aspirations as these, which should rise from the very depths of your soul. "O God of love, God Who are charity, diffuse Your love in my heart and also the love of those souls for whom Your Son died in an excess of love. O Jesus, so meek and humble of heart, give me a meekness and humility like yours. O true lover of souls, make me share the inextinguishable thirst You had for their salvation. O Wisdom of the Father, enlighten my spirit and direct my ways that, along with those you have entrusted to me, I may attain that perfection to which You have called me in your infinite kindness."

4. RECOLLECTION

This last means will make all the others easy. It includes them all, and without it you can hardly practice the others, at least not in any lasting way. Therefore, although we speak of this recollection last, it must be the main object of your attention. If you are recollected, the most useful considerations will present themselves to your mind spontaneously and make a deep impression on it. You will not miss the occasions for putting them in practice. Above all you will be continually moved to pour out your soul before God in humble, fervent prayer. Then you will have a great familiarity with Jesus Christ, God will be the center of your thoughts, desires and affections. Your whole life will be intimately united to God. You will have recourse to Jesus in everything, you will consult Him, He will instruct you, enlighten you, and lead you on to what is better. You will be faithful to His inspirations and graces, and so act in entire dependence upon Him. His virtues will become yours; His spirit will guide and animate you, or

rather, Jesus Himself will govern and direct everything by you, and he will grant numberless benefits to a community which will belong wholly to Him.

These advantages will show you the excellence of recollection. They are very powerful motives to inspire you with the desire to devote yourself to it. A true idea of what recollection is in itself will still further urge you to this and make you understand the way in which you should tend towards it.

To be habitually recollected, to live the interior life, the life of faith, to watch constantly over our hearts - all this comes to practically the same thing. It is the grace of which St. Paul speaks so movingly to the Ephesians, the grace he asks so earnestly for them in these words: "I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you...For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might into the inward man." Eph. 3:1, 14-16

These emphatic and beautiful expressions of the Apostle, the ineffable gifts of which he speaks in the same place as being the effect of this grace, are ample to give you a lofty idea of these virtues. But I do not intend to develop this subject. I intend rather to define what constitutes this recollection to which I am urging you.

To be recollected or interior means to be detached from exterior and sensible objects; it means to live retired within ourselves in order to be occupied with God and the perfection of our souls. It is to judge of things not so much by appearances as by their intrinsic worth, to judge not according to the senses, but according to faith. It is to go beyond secondary causes to the Supreme Cause, to consider not so much the will and action of man, but rather the Will and action of God of which man is simply the instrument, sometimes in a way entirely contrary to his own ideas. It is also to watch continually over the movements of the heart to keep it free from any vain feeling of joy or sadness, of fear or desire. Finally it is to be always alert to the inspirations of grace in order to follow them faithfully.

This virtue, this practice of recollection is based on the truth St. Paul reminds us of so often, namely, that we are the temples of God where the Holy Spirit dwells, and also on these other truths to which reason and faith both bear witness, i.e., everything depends on God, He governs everything, nothing happens without His Will and permission, He makes everything serve for His glory, and all creatures, since they bear some imprint of His perfections, should raise our minds to Him. This virtue has its foundation in the infinite grandeur of God and the lowliness of the creature, the extent to which the mysteries of religion exceed all earthly things and the certainty of the light of faith compared with the illusions of the senses. We need this recollection because of the continual danger to which we are exposed when exterior things occupy us too much and the infinite losses which result when we neglect to guard our heart, as well as the respect and fidelity due to the

divine inspirations.

We are the temples of God. God dwells in us, not by His essence, power and presence, as in other creatures, but in a special manner proper to reasonable beings and to those who are in His friendship. By His grace He dwells in us as in a tabernacle. He is in our hearts as in a place where He takes "His delight, so, that if by any possibility He could be absent elsewhere, He would still remain in the soul which loves Him. He dwells in our hearts as in a sanctuary; there He awaits our adoration and homage, there He is constantly pouring out favors, and there He manifests Himself. It is there that the promise Our Lord made to His friends is fulfilled. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, He it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me shall be beloved of My Father and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...If any one love Me, He will keep My word. And My Father will love Him; and We shall come to him and will make our abode with him." John 14:21-23 How forcibly this teaches us that we should remain in our interior, since God Himself dwells there, and that we must not admit the least disorder into this temple but always be busy about adorning it. "Holiness becomes Your House, O Lord, unto length of days." Psalms 93:5

A thousand things draw man out of himself, he must fulfill various duties, converse with his fellowmen, procure the necessities of life, etc. It is difficult, almost impossible, to be recollected in the midst of all these occupations. Nevertheless, even in the midst of all this, the interior man does not lose sight of God. Rather, he knows how to raise his mind to God by reflecting on the principle already referred to – namely, that God does everything in His creatures. The interior man sees God in them, as through a veil which hides Him only from the senses. He returns to God all the good he receives from creatures, and he also embraces, as coming from God, all that he suffers from them, even the evil which comes through the free will of man. He looks upon this evil as ordained by divine Providence for his good. For this reason the holy King David forbade anyone to arrest Semei when the latter was pursuing him. "And the king said...'Let him alone and let him curse: for the Lord has bidden him curse David. And who is he who shall dare say: why has he done so?'" 2 Sam. 16:10 In this way the life of the interior man becomes a continual succession of acts of gratitude, love, submission and conformity to the Will of God.

Even though God were not present to see us (as he actually is) even though He were not showering benefits upon us through His creatures, His infinite grandeur would demand that, since we can think about Him and be occupied with Him, we should not neglect to do so. This motive makes a deep impression on the interior soul. Knowing that she is created for God and is capable of knowing and loving Him, that she thus bears the stamp of His likeness, and realizing, too, the nothingness and unworthiness of creatures, she is above giving them her full attention and fixes it on God as far as possible. He is the only One Whom she desires to please. God and creatures are the witnesses of her actions but she thinks only of God or, if

she tries to content creatures, it is solely in view of God. She is like a painter at work in the presence of some great monarch and is, therefore, not at all concerned with some poor peasant who chances to be present.

It is from the greatness of God that our holy mysteries draw their excellence. They are His most wonderful works; a truly recollected mind is so struck with admiration of them that it would like to dwell on nothing else. Such a mind even regrets time she must give to temporal affairs. As for the dissipated soul God thus reproaches her by his prophet. "How long will you be dissolute in deliciousness, O wandering daughter?" Jer. 31:22 O blind and deluded souls, why do you lose yourselves among creatures? Why do you ask them for consolations and joys which are unworthy of your sublime end and which keep you far from God? Has He not performed works worthy of your admiration? A God made man, a virgin Mother of God, the other mysteries which accompanied or followed that of the Incarnation - here are matters which should command your whole attention, calm your mind and concentrate it on God, becoming for you a never-failing fountain of pure delights.

The continual illusions of the senses, the dangers to which we are exposed when we let them guide us, the loss of grace resulting from this -- here are urgent reasons that show us the necessity of recollection. Everything we see, hear, touch, feel, and taste is likely to deceive us through appearances, and make us consider as good, things which are really bad, or to reject the better things as evil. These impressions of the senses fill our minds with images, our hearts with desires and affections that turn us from the Sovereign Good. They lead us to precipices and spread snares for us at every step. In the darkness which covers us when we follow them, we do not notice our wanderings nor the evil into which we fall. Recollection alone will preserve us from these illusions and dangers by causing us to walk in the light of faith.

We said above that due respect for grace and prompt docility to its inspirations demand an interior and recollected life. This is easy to understand. It is not for nothing that God dwells in our hearts. He Who works constantly in the visible and natural world cannot remain inactive within us. He keeps pouring out the riches of His mercy there; He is constantly directing, enlightening, and perfecting the soul where He is pleased to dwell. Is it not clearly an inappreciable advantage for us to be conscious of His operations? The real secret of our sanctification is complete fidelity in corresponding with them. Now these operations of God are very delicate, the soul must be in a state of great calm to receive and not hinder their effects. The voice of the Lord is "like the whisper of a gentle breeze". 1 Kings 19:11-12 His light is not always dazzling, and it soon passes. All this proves to us how indispensable tranquility, silence, and attention to the interior life really are, and how much our perfection depends on them.

I have spoken at length on these motives for recollection, because the point is important for all sorts of persons, but most particularly for Superiors, who cannot properly fulfill their responsibilities without this virtue. It is the means to have God always with you. "Draw near to God", says St. James, and He will draw near to you." James 4:8 This must be done, not in a passing way and only for a few days, weeks, or months, but during our whole life. Then only shall we be truly interior and recollected, words which presuppose a state, a habit, not simply some passing acts made during a period of greater fervor. We must practice interior recollection in times of desolation as in times of consolation, in hours of darkness as in hours of light, because this practice does not depend on what belongs to the feelings, but is based on faith. We can, and we must, therefore, devote ourselves to it at all times.

There is still one point which I must not pass over while I am speaking of this subject. That point is the necessity of joining mortification to recollection in order to make the latter solid and lasting. Unmortified passions trouble and sully the soul; they make it a habitation unworthy of God; He cannot make His presence felt in such a soul, or rather, He makes it felt by reproaches. If the soul is not resolved to mortify herself, she will conceive a sort of horror for this recollection which, through her own fault, has become so bitter and painful. Besides, unmortified passions cause countless distractions incompatible with the interior life. The mind is wholly occupied with useless or harmful thoughts, the heart with vain desires and ill-regulated affections, so that neither the one nor the other can tend freely to God. Interior mortification removes this difficulty. It destroys everything in the soul which displeases God; it keeps the passions in order, thus shutting off the principle source of distractions and establishing the soul in that peace which attention to God demands.

Nevertheless, there remains one thing which might prove an obstacle. Even though passions and inordinate desires remain subdued, so long as a person yields to his senses in lawful things and permits himself everything in which he can see no sin, allowing his eyes to see, his ears to hear, his taste to savor what they please, provided it is not against the law of God, he can never be recollected. The human soul is too limited to concentrate on several things, especially when these are so opposed as attention to God and attention to creatures, satisfaction of the senses and spiritual delights. Inevitably the numerous images of created things will form a thick cloud over the understanding, a cloud which obscures the idea and the consciousness of God. Besides, such liberty of the senses is very little in conformity with the counsel of Jesus Christ that we must sacrifice these things before we can aspire to any intimate communications with Him. All these hindrances cannot be surmounted without the exterior mortification which regulates the senses and keeps them in order.

From all that has just been said, you should conclude that your mortification, both interior and exterior, should not be any less than your

desire of recollection. May this desire itself be such as to enable you to use all the other means proper to form a perfect superior.

I resume in a few words all that has been said to this effect. Conceive a correct idea of your responsibility; often recall to mind that you represent Jesus Christ, that the souls entrusted to your care are His spouses and that you have been given your position in order to lead them to the high perfection God asks of them. Consider that your responsibility is great and of a nature to inspire you with fear, but that your confidence in God must be greater still because, in calling you to such a task, He has given you a special pledge of His love, which is a guarantee of His assistance. Raise your eyes to the reward which is destined for you, if the divine Spouse finds you arrayed in the virtues

He desires to see in a Superior. The most essential of these are, as we have seen, an ardent love of God, a tender and compassionate charity towards all your subjects without distinction, a gentleness proof against all contradictions, a humility all the deeper because of your elevation which makes a fall all the more dangerous, a tireless zeal ready for any sacrifice for the good of souls, a prudence that understands how to prevent or remedy evil and which, instructed by God, adjusts itself to circumstances and to persons, making itself, as St. Paul said, "I became all things to all men, that I might save all." 1 Cor. 9:22

Above all, do not neglect to put in practice the means for attaining these virtues. Let frequent considerations draw you on to this end. From time to time take an account of yourself and see how far you still are from perfection. Put these reflections into action; practice them as well as you can with the help of grace. Ask this grace by humble, fervent, constant prayer. Finally, be really interior and recollected. In order to become so, use the aid of interior and exterior mortification.

I humbly implore the divine Majesty to give you the grace of carrying out all these things, as He has accorded me the grace of explaining them to you. Place your whole trust in His infinite Goodness. Do not let your weakness or frailty be any cause for discouragement or fear.

Go on as you have begun. Your strength will grow each day with grace. And if you persevere, I can assure you that a great and glorious reward is reserved for you in heaven.

I say this to you in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to Whom be all honor and glory forever and ever. Amen