

CHAPTER III

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

443. My dear daughter, I shall not deny thee the instruction thou askest of me with the desire of putting it into practice; yet do thou receive it with appreciation and a devout spirit, promptly putting it into action. The Wise Man says: *My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, thou hast engaged fast thy hand to a stranger; thou art ensnared with the words of thy mouth, and caught with thy own words* (Prov. 6:1-2). Hence he who has made vows to God has bound his own will, and thus has no freedom of acting except according to the will and direction of Him to whom he has bound himself, for he is chained down by the words of his own mouth uttered in the profession of his vows. Before taking his vows the choice of his ways was in his own hands; but having once bound and obliged himself, let him know he has entirely lost his liberty and has delivered himself up to God in his superiors. The whole ruin or salvation of souls depends upon the use of their free will; but since most men misuse it and damn themselves, the Most High has established religious life under the sacred vows. Thus the creature, by once using his liberty to make a perfect and prudent choice, can deliver up to His Majesty in that act the very liberty by which so many are lost if they remain unencumbered and free to choose or not to choose.

444. By these vows the liberty to do evil is happily lost, and the liberty for doing good is assured, like a bridle which leads away from danger and directs onto the smooth and sure road. The soul is freed from the slavery and subjection of the passions and acquires a new power over them, resuming her place as mistress and queen in the government of her kingdom, and remaining subject only to the law of grace and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. If she thus applies her whole will solely to the fulfillment of all she has promised to God, the Holy Ghost shall govern and direct all her operations. The creature thereby passes from the condition and state of a slave to that of a child of the Most High, from an earthly to an angelic life, while the corruption and evil effects of sin cannot exert their full power. It is impossible for thee to ever be able in this earthly life to calculate or comprehend what and how many are the blessings and treasures those souls gather for themselves who with all their powers and affection strive to fulfill perfectly the vows of their profession, for I assure thee, my dearest, that those who are perfect and punctual in their religious obligations can equal and even surpass the martyrs in merit.

445. My daughter, thou didst happily begin to gather these blessings on the day when thou didst choose the best part; but remember well thou hast bound thyself to the eternal and mighty God, to whom the inmost secrets of thy heart are manifest. If lying to earthly men and failing them in just promises is something so ugly and abhorrent to reason, how weighty shall infidelity to God be in the most just and holy promises? As thy Creator, Preserver and Benefactor thou owest Him gratitude, as Father reverence, as Spouse fidelity, as a Friend amiable reciprocity; as the most Faithful thou owest Him faith and hope, as the highest and eternal Good thy love, as the Omnipotent thy subjection, and as the most just Judge thy holy fear and humility. Hence against all these titles and many others thou dost commit perfidious treason in breaking the promises thou hast made in thy profession. And if in all the nuns who have obliged themselves to a spiritual life and conversation it is such a monstrous and terrible abomination to call themselves spouses of Christ while living as members and slaves of the devil, much more abominable shall it be in thee, who hast received more than all of them, and thus thou must exceed them in love, in labor, and in the return for such incomparable blessings and benefits.

446. Consider, O soul, how detestable this fault would make thee in the sight of the Lord, of myself, and of the angels and saints, for we are all witnesses of the love and fidelity He has shown thee as a generous, loving and faithful Spouse. Strive then with all thy heart to avoid offending Him either in great or in small things; do not force Him to relinquish thee and deliver thee over to the beastly disorders of sin, for thou knowest this would be a greater misfortune and punishment than if He would surrender thee to the fury of the elements, or to the wrath of all the wild animals, or even to the rage of the demons. If all these were to execute their anger upon thee, and if the world were to heap upon thee all its punishments and insults, all would do thee less damage than one venial sin against the God whom thou art obliged to serve and love in all things and through all things. Any punishment of this life is less dreadful than sin, for it ends with mortal life, while the guilt of sin, and its concomitant pain and chastisement, may be eternal.

447. In this life any punishment or tribulation fills mortals with fear and dread merely because it affects the senses and brings them in close touch with it through them, but the guilt of sin does not affect them nor fill them with dread. Men are entirely taken up by that which is visible, and hence they do not look upon the ultimate consequence of sin, which is the eternal punishment of hell. Being absorbed and united with sin itself is so grave, and the human heart so sluggish, that it allows itself to become intoxicated with sin and does not feel shame because the inferno of sin is not felt by the senses; and when it could see and sense it by faith, it allows faith to remain idle and dead as if it did not possess it. O most unhappy blindness of mortals! O apathy and negligence, which keeps so many souls capable of reason and glory deceitfully oppressed! There are no words or reasonings sufficient to describe this terrible and tremendous danger. My daughter, hasten away and flee with holy fear such an unhappy state, and deliver thyself up to all the labors and torments of life, which soon pass, rather than incur such a danger, for nothing will be lacking to thee if thou dost not lose God. To be convinced there are no small faults for thee and for thy state is a powerful means of saving thyself; fear greatly the small things, for in despising small faults the Most High knows the human heart invites other greater ones. That is not a blameless love which does not avoid all displeasure of the beloved.

448. The order which religious souls should maintain in their desires should be in the first place to strive to be punctual in fulfilling the obligations of their vows and all the virtues which are connected with them. Afterwards and secondarily they may engage in voluntary practices, which are called works of supererogation. This order some souls, who are misled by the devil to entertain an indiscreet zeal for perfection, are accustomed to invert; thus, while they fail seriously in the obligations of their state, they are eager to add other voluntary exercises and practices which are usually of small use or benefit, or arise from a spirit of presumption and singularity. They secretly desire to be looked upon as distinguished in zeal and perfection, while in truth they are very far even from the beginning of perfection. I do not want to see in thee a fault so reprehensible; first fulfill all the duties of thy vows and of community life, and then thou mayest add what thou canst according to thy ability and the inspiration of divine grace. These together shall beautify thy soul and make it perfect and agreeable in the eyes of God.

449. The vow of obedience is the principal one in religion, for it implies a total renunciation and denial of one's will. By it the religious renounces all jurisdiction or right to say for himself: I will or I will not, I shall or I shall not act. All this he throws aside and renounces by obedience, delivering himself into the hands of his superior. In order to fulfill this obligation it is necessary

for thee to *be not wise in thy own conceit*,* nor to imagine thyself still mistress of thy likings, thy desires, or thy opinions; for true obedience must be of the quality of faith so the commands of the superior are esteemed, revered, and put into execution without any pretense of examination or criticism. Accordingly, in order to obey thou must consider thyself without opinion, without life of thy own, without right of speech; thou must allow thyself to be moved and governed like a corpse, alive only in order to execute devotedly all the superior desires. Never discuss within thyself whether thou shouldst fulfill his commands or not, but only consider how thou canst best execute that which is commanded. Sacrifice thy own will and repress all thy appetites and passions, and when by this efficacious determination thou art dead to all the movements of self, let obedience be the soul and life of thy works. To the will of thy superior thou must conform all thy own will with all its activity in all thy words and works. Let it be thy prayer to be able to quit thy own being and receive another new one so nothing shall be thine and all in thee shall be of obedience without contradiction or resistance.

450. Remember, the most perfect manner of obeying is to avoid offending the superior by showing thou dost disagree with him. He should find a willing obedience, convincing him that his commands are obeyed promptly without objection or murmur, either in words or by any other signs. The superiors take the place of God, and he who obeys his superiors obeys the Lord himself who is in them, governs them, and enlightens them so their commands will be for the salvation of souls. The contempt shown to superiors passes on to God himself (Lk. 10:16), who through them manifests and makes known his will. Thou must persuade thyself that the Lord moves them to speak, or that it is the language of the omnipotent God himself. My daughter, strive to be obedient so thou mayest speak of victories (Prov. 21:28). Do not fear to obey, for that is the secure path, so secure that God will not bring to account the errors of the obedient on Judgment Day, but rather He will blot out other sins in consideration of the sacrifice made in obedience. My most holy Son offered his most precious Passion and Death with particular affection for the obedient, so by this virtue they would receive an increase in pardon and grace, and success and perfection of all they would work by obedience; and now many times He presents to the eternal Father, in order to appease Him toward men, that He died for them obedient unto the cross (Philip. 2:8), and thus the Father is placated toward men. Because He was pleased with the obedience of Abraham and his son Isaac, He held Himself obliged not only to save the son from death, who showed himself so obedient, but to make Abraham the ancestor of the incarnate Word and signalize him from among the rest as the head and foundation of such blessings (Gen. 22:16-18).

451. The vow of poverty is a generous renunciation and detachment from the heavy burden of temporal things. It is an alleviation of the spirit, a relief provided for human infirmity, and the liberty of a noble heart to strive after eternal and spiritual blessings. It is a satiety and abundance in which the thirst after earthly treasures is allayed, and a sovereignty or ownership and a most noble enjoyment of all riches is established. All this, my daughter, and many other blessings are contained in voluntary poverty, and of all this the sons of the world are ignorant and deprived precisely because they are lovers of earthly riches and enemies of this rich and holy poverty. Although they feel and suffer it, they do not consider the heavy weight of riches which pins them to the earth and drives them into its very bowels to seek gold and silver in great anxiety, sleeplessness, labors and sweat, as if they were not men but wild beasts that know not what they are suffering and doing. And if they are thus weighed down before acquiring riches, how much

* cf. Prov. 3:7 [Ed.]

more when they have come into their possession? Let the countless hosts who have fallen into hell with their burden proclaim it; let their incalculable anxieties of preserving their riches, and much more, let the intolerable laws which riches and those who possess them have foisted upon the world testify what is required to retain them.

452. If all this suffocates the spirit and tyrannically oppresses it in its weakness, if they suppress the soul's most noble privilege of following eternal goods and God himself, it is certain that voluntary poverty restores to man the nobility of his condition, liberating him from vile servitude and reinstating him in his noble freedom and mastery of all things. The soul is never more a sovereign than when it despises them, and only then does it have the more firm possession and makes the more excellent use of riches when it gives them away or leaves them of its own free will; its appetite for them is best satiated only when it does not care to possess them. Then above all is the heart set free and made capable of the treasures of the Divinity, for which it is furnished by the Creator with an almost infinite capacity.

453. My daughter, I desire thee to study diligently this divine philosophy and science which the world forgets, and not only the world but also many religious souls who have promised it to God. Great is the divine wrath because of this fault, and suddenly will the infringers of this vow receive heavy and unexpected punishment. By setting aside their voluntary poverty they have alienated themselves from the spirit of Christ, my most holy Son, and all that He and I have come to teach men in abnegation and poverty. Although they do not now feel it because the Judge delays and they enjoy the abundance which they desire, yet in their judgment they will find themselves overwhelmed and dismayed by the rigor of their punishment, greater than they ever expected, considered or imagined in their forgetfulness of divine justice.

454. The temporal goods are created by the Most High for the sole purpose of sustaining life; having attained this end the need of them ceases. And since this need is limited and is soon and easily satisfied, there is no reason why the care for one's immortal soul should be temporary and as it were in passing, while the hunger after riches is so perpetual and continual as it has become among men. It is the height of perversity for man to exchange the end for the means in something so important and urgent; that he devotes all his time, all his care, all the exertion of his powers, and all the alertness of his mind to the life of his body, of which he knows not the duration nor the end, and on the other hand in many years of his existence he spares for his poor soul only one hour, and that very often the last and worst one of his whole life.

455. Make use therefore, my dearest daughter, of the true enlightenment by which the Most High has undeceived thee in regard to such a dangerous error. Renounce all affection or inclination for earthly things, and even under the pretext of the necessity and poverty of thy convent do not be overly solicitous to procure the things used for the sustenance of life. In exerting ordinary care let it be such as shall not disturb thee when thou dost fail to obtain what thou dost desire, and let it be without inordinate affection, even when thou dost seek it for the service of God, for thou must know thy love of God shall be so much the less as the number of things thou lovest together with Him is greater. Great possessions thou must renounce as superfluous; thou dost not need them, and it is a crime to keep them for no purpose. The little of which thou dost stand in need should also be esteemed but little, for it would be a great error to embarrass the heart with that which is of no account and can hinder it much. If thou hast all that according to thy judgment is necessary for human wants thou art not in reality poor, for to be poor properly and strictly means to have less than what is necessary, while only he is called rich to whom nothing is lacking. To possess more than is necessary creates unrest and affliction of

spirit; to desire and keep it without having use for it will result in a poverty without rest or tranquility.

456. I want from thee such a freedom of spirit that thou dost not attach thyself to anything, be it great or small, superfluous or necessary. Of the things which are necessary for human life accept only so much as is needed to prevent death or indecency. Let this latter be of the poorest and of such as is patched up sufficiently to cover thee, and in thy nourishment seek what is most coarse without satisfying thy particular whims of taste, but asking for what is insipid and tasteless, so thou mayest purposefully be served what is disagreeable and be deprived of what the appetite craves, thus seeking in all things the greatest perfection.

457. The vow of chastity includes purity of body and soul; it is easy to lose it, but difficult and even impossible to repair it depending upon the manner of losing it. This great treasure is deposited in a castle which has many portals and openings, and if these are not all well guarded and defended the treasure is without security. My daughter, in order to preserve perfectly this vow it is necessary to make an inviolable pact with thy senses* not to use them except for what is according to the dictates of reason and for the glory of the Creator. After once the senses are mortified it will be easy to overcome thy enemies, for only through them can they conquer thee; for no thoughts can recur, or be awakened to activity, unless fomented and excited by the images and impressions admitted through the exterior senses. Thou must not touch, nor look upon, nor speak to any person of whatever condition, whether man or woman, so as to let their images or resemblances find entrance into thy imagination. This carefulness which I enjoin shall be the guard of the purity which I require of thee. If out of charity or obedience thou must converse with them (for only these virtues are sufficient causes for conversing with creatures) do it with all gravity, modesty and reserve.

458. In regard to thy own person live as if thou wert a pilgrim and stranger in this world; be poor, mortified, laborious, loving the hardship connected with temporal things, without expecting alleviation or enjoyment, as one who is absent from her home and her country, enlisted to work and battle against powerful foes. Since the flesh is the center of weakness and danger, it is proper for thee to carefully resist thy natural likings and through them the temptations of the demons. Raise thyself above thyself, and seek a habitation far above all that is earthly so thou mayest live under the shadow of Him whom thou desirest (Cant. 2:3), and in his protection thou shalt enjoy tranquility and true refreshment. Deliver thyself over with thy whole heart to his chaste and holy love, without attending to any creatures except insofar as they may help and oblige thee to love and serve thy Creator; in all other respects they must be to thee abhorrent.

459. Although no virtue should be lacking in her who professes herself and is entitled to call herself a spouse of Christ, yet it is the virtue of chastity which makes her most worthy and like unto her Spouse, for it is chastity which makes her spiritual and withdraws her from earthly corruption, elevating her to an angelic life and to a certain resemblance of God himself. This virtue beautifies and adorns all the rest, raises the body to a higher existence, enlightens the mind, and preserves in the soul a nobility above all that is corruptible. Because this virtue was a special fruit of the Redemption, merited by my most holy Son on the cross where He paid for the sins of the world, therefore Holy Scripture expressly mentions that virgins accompany and follow the Lamb (Apoc. 14:4).

460. The vow of enclosure is the wall of chastity and of all virtues, and the environment where they are preserved and shine forth; it is a privilege granted by heaven to the spouses of Christ in

* cf. Job 31:1 [Ed.]

religion, dispensing them from the burdensome and dangerous tribute which the freedom of the world pays to the ruler of its vanities. By this vow the religious live as in a secure port, while other souls navigate and are tossed about in the storms of a dangerous sea. With so many advantages enclosure cannot be considered as a confinement in a narrow space, for in it are offered to the religious the spacious fields of virtue, of the knowledge of God, his infinite perfections, his mysteries, and his benefits conferred on man. On such spacious grounds can a nun recreate and enjoy herself, and only when she fails in this enjoyment does she begin to feel narrow confinement in this, the greatest freedom. For thee, my daughter, let there be no expansion in this; yet neither do I desire to see thee confine thyself to such narrow limits as even the entire world. Rise up to the height of the knowledge and love of God, where there are no limits or confines to hold thee, and where thou canst live in unbounded liberty. From that eminence thou shalt see how small, vile and despicable is all that is created, and how much too narrow it is to hold thy soul.

461. To the necessary enclosure of the body add also the restrictions of the senses, that imbued with fortitude they may preserve for thee interior purity, and through it keep ablaze the fire of the sanctuary (Lv. 6:12) which thou must continue to nourish and watch lest it be extinguished. In order to better guard the senses and profit from the vow of enclosure, do not approach the portals, nor the speaking grate, nor the windows, and do not even remember that the convent is furnished therewith, unless it is required by some particular office or by obedience. Desire nothing, and therefore strive after nothing, and do not exert thyself for that which is not allowed thee to desire. In retirement, solitude and circumspection thou shalt find thy peace. Thereby thou shalt give me pleasure and merit for thyself copious fruit and the reward of love and grace which thou dost desire.