

714:        *To All the Sisters*

Motherhouse in Munich  
Feast of the Holy Trinity, May 30, 1847

My dearly beloved Sisters in Jesus and  
Daughters of the most Blessed Virgin Mary!

My dear Spiritual Daughters!  
Cordial greetings to each of you in the Lord!

For years, several American bishops and missionaries have been tearfully pleading for Poor School Sisters to teach the young girls in America—whose education is completely neglected—so that Catholic Christianity could take deeper root in families and grow stronger there.

The father of our country, King Louis, accepted this mission with great joy and the archbishop<sup>1</sup> approved it. God willing, the sisters will leave the middle of next month by steamship for St. Marys, Pennsylvania, a city in North America. Your poor Mother, Mary Theresa of Jesus, will accompany them but wishes to leave a memento as a farewell to her spiritual daughters who are staying behind.

I know of nothing better to entrust to you, dear Sisters, than what we have already spoken of so often, both in person and in writing. Accept it therefore, read it, and take it to heart!

The religious life to which the merciful God has called us without any merit on our part obliges each of us without exception to strive constantly for *perfection*. Our dear Lord calls us to “be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>2</sup> In my opinion, our perfection lies in the *love of God*. In God’s eyes, our love for God is the measure of our perfection as

religious. In all things, may God be our goal and our end, our highest good in whom we find all that makes us content and truly happy. Daily, yes hourly, and at the beginning of every single work, let us offer our inmost thoughts to God whom we honor with every word we speak.

Let us never tolerate anything in our hearts that is not of God. Therefore, let us free ourselves of all created things and let go of acquaintances and relatives in particular. Let us give our whole heart to God; it belongs to God. When we have come to the point that we would rather die than offend the Highest Good by even the smallest sin, we possess a good sign of God's love.

Let us love God above all things and our *companion sisters* and our neighbors *as ourselves*. The Holy Spirit has brought us together and Jesus Christ, our Divine Bridegroom, has knotted the close bonds among us and has accepted us into his service as sisters and as brides. Therefore, let us love one another in times of health and sickness, of joy and sorrow!

Let us lovingly care for our sick and *elderly sisters* who, according to a physician's statement, are not able to follow the regular order with regard to rising, food, and work—surely to their own great regret. Let us not look askance at them or judge them unkindly when their frail bodies occasionally require better food or it becomes necessary for them to partake of food or drink outside of mealtime. These disturbing exceptions are more repugnant to them than to anyone else. "The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you"<sup>3</sup>—either with or without mercy.

Let us lovingly remember our *deceased* sisters, come to their assistance by prayer and works of penance as prescribed by our holy rule, and be mindful before God of the anniversaries of their death. What a consolation it will be when our companion sisters do the same for us. God always

arranges for this—for God is just. Whatever we do to the least of these, we do to Jesus.<sup>4</sup> This is the sign by which we will be recognized as perfect religious, disciples, and brides of Jesus—that we love one another after the example of Jesus, who on the cross still prayed for his enemies and who loves us all unto death.

No matter how much it storms outside, our order will stand firm and continue to flourish as long as we persevere in holy love among ourselves and keep far from us the malicious kind of particular love and friendship that pollutes everything. However, if we sever this bond of divine and sisterly love, if we cease to treat each other with *reverence, humility, and gentleness*, our order will disband through our own inexcusable fault, to the displeasure of God, and to our own ruin. Therefore, let us hold fast to Jesus and Mary, to our holy Catholic Church, and to our *general motherhouse* within the Church so that we will not waver.

Let us act *more humbly* after each confession and, in union with Jesus, show *greater love* after each Holy Communion. Then we need not fear that God will cease to protect this work with divine power.

### *The Holy Vows*

We will preserve and manifest this love before God and others if we faithfully observe our *holy vows*. They are the instruments that protect us from all enemies, sin, and evil. The holy vows are both our arms and our crown. On the day of your holy profession, dear Sisters, I promised you eternal life in the name of Jesus if you keep your holy vows faithfully.

## *Obedience*

The first vow and the sacrifice most pleasing to God is *obedience*, obedience in things easy or difficult, pleasant or adverse. Dear Sisters, let us embrace and love obedience as Jesus, our Divine Bridegroom, loved obedience and lived it even unto death. As a hungry person craves food, so should we, as religious, constantly long for obedience because obedience makes us holy before God. Without obedience, nothing is pleasing to God, no matter what we do.

Therefore, dear Sisters, let us always see the *person of Jesus* in all our *superiors* and *companion sisters*. Jesus speaks to us through them. Jesus guides us through them. Jesus teaches this to us. We may—in fact, we must—believe Jesus. Has it ever been heard that an obedient religious went astray or failed to become holy? On the other hand, what became of disobedient religious who followed their own will? They fell into the abyss of vice just as the disobedient angels did and were hurled from heaven into hell. Disobedient religious perished, even in the convent, after they made the house of God a den of thieves. It cannot be otherwise since God fights against disobedient, rebellious religious who obey only with murmuring and complaint, with sighs and tears, or who obey only after they have been told two or three times—and then only grudgingly. These disobedient religious rise up against God whom they do not accept, whose word and guidance they reject, and whom they try to dethrone in order to enthrone their own will, just like the leader of the fallen angels in heaven. Do not disobedient sisters always resemble the fallen angels? They will share the same fate.

How different things will be for those sisters who bear the yoke of Jesus with love and patience, just as they promised at their entrance into the convent when they received from my

hands the image of Jesus crucified. These devout sisters humbly submit to their superiors for the love of God and, fully resigned, allow Jesus to guide them through their superiors, as good children are guided by their mother, as sheep their shepherd. For this reason, they are the sheep who belong to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who will not abandon them in eternity.

*Humble* sisters are also *obedient* sisters. Wherever proud self-will prevails, there is disobedience. In the eyes of God, our order will have *as many holy sisters* as it has *obedient sisters*. If we are obedient, we may certainly count on God's help in all that concerns convent and school. We will have help from Jesus Christ and will make progress in perfection to the degree that we practice blind, childlike, reverent, punctual, and prompt obedience. In holy obedience, we show in action before God and others what we say so often in words—that we believe in God, hope in God, and love God—since obedience includes all the virtues.

Oh, who of us would not want to be obedient in both the smallest and the greatest things! Let us practice obedience for the love of God just as Mary, our holy mother, always practiced it

### *Poverty*

Religious obedience also requires holy poverty, which Jesus loved so ardently and sanctified by divine, lifelong example. In accordance with God's divine counsel, we have chosen to leave everything and follow Jesus in order to gain treasure for heaven. Since we vowed to live voluntary poverty according to Jesus' holy example, we are now obliged to practice poverty if we do not want to be struck down by the same eternal death that befell Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>5</sup>

Dear Sisters, we may no longer consider anything our own and therefore—without our superior’s lawful permission—we may neither give nor take anything, hold back anything, promise anything, accept anything from others or conceal it for ourselves, exchange anything, or take anything along on a journey. We may not use as we please what the convent has given us for the journey, be it food, clothing, money, books, pictures, or whatever else it might be. God wills it thus; we have vowed it. If we want to stand before God, we must keep our vow lest we mock God who is just and who will judge us in the future.

All novices must practice this exactly and in the smallest detail. Otherwise, they will not observe the rule after they are professed and they will not be faithful in greater things. Let us not be satisfied with this observance but strive instead for *perfection* in accordance with our holy vocation. Precisely because we are Poor School Sisters, we must always be content with little and sparing with what our superiors give us for our use. If we have a choice, let us take the worst for ourselves and leave the best for our companion sisters. This is really leaving it to Jesus in the person of our sisters.

In case we experience even greater need and higher prices, or if other chastisements from God befall us, as we well deserve, let us willingly suffer want like Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Lazarus, and thousands of other saints who were poor. While at first sight this appears bitter and repugnant to the senses, how much more pleasant it becomes as soon as one has grasped its real meaning and realizes God’s love!

What a great and undeserved honor it is for us poor creatures that we should resemble Jesus, the Son of God, and Mary, the Virgin Mother of Our Order, even if our poor way of life is not the same as theirs!

We may be as little concerned as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.<sup>6</sup> Jesus looks after us in the best possible way, providing clothing and food. Yes, Jesus will care for us just as he cared for his dear apostles and those poor people who followed him into the desert.

If we would have to conduct schools without temporal resources and if the earth would cease to provide us with bread, God could let bread rain from heaven for us today, just as it rained down for the Israelites in the desert. All power in heaven and on earth was given to Jesus. How could the Divine Bridegroom who loves us with an inexpressible love allow his faithful, obedient, poverty-loving brides to perish? Therefore, dear Sisters, do not be afraid! Trust in God and walk in God's ways, for then God will also be with you—the infinitely good and merciful God!

Neither God nor anyone else will call us if we—who bear the name *Poor School Sisters*—express a thousand *sensory* needs and make demands on externs,<sup>7</sup> relatives, and schoolchildren, or buy, exchange, acquire, accept, keep, conceal, consume, or use things in a manner that is forbidden by our holy rule and, therefore, sinful. We will be detested and driven away instead for breaking the vow of poverty.

We Poor School Sisters fail against poverty if we *shun work* and have it done by seculars when it is not necessary—no matter if the wages are high or low—or if we are never satisfied with little but want everything to be beautiful and in generous supply. We fail if we are no longer careful about little things in clothing, food, furniture, utensils for kitchen or garden, school supplies, needlework materials, and so forth, whether it is for ourselves or for the boarders. These little things are of great significance to a devout religious because Jesus assures us that those who are unfaithful in smaller things will be unfaithful in greater things as well. So many

religious houses that were no longer attentive to little things and gradually turned away from God lapsed into worldly sensuality and finally gave up the spirit of poverty completely.

The spirit of poverty is also the spirit of our order. If we depart from it, dear Sisters, our order will decline. How will those sisters who have contributed to this decline be able to answer before the judgment seat of God? The good angels will sorrowfully depart from them and the fallen angels will advance to accuse them before the throne of God, bringing forward every failure against holy poverty. Judas was also unfaithful—stealing little things at first—and then he sold Jesus for a few pieces of silver. How did he end?

### *Chastity*

Obedience bids us as brides of Jesus to observe holy chastity and to keep ourselves pure and undefiled in body and soul. We have known for a long time, dear Sisters, that this beautiful and delicate virtue is easily lost. Chastity will be able to blossom pure and undefiled in each of us only if it is surrounded by the thorns of strict *discipline* and *watchfulness*. This is why daily mortification is so necessary. As long as we *pray* with humility and trust, God will not allow us to fall. Let us constantly live so that we can receive *Holy Communion* often and become stronger in the battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Whenever the clock strikes the hour during the day, and perhaps even oftener, let us call upon Mary, the Mother of Our Order, for help with childlike confidence, especially during the time of temptation.

## *Enclosure*

In order to keep our hearts pure, it is absolutely necessary to observe *enclosure* with all diligence and zeal. Jesus meant what he said when he warned us, “Be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.”<sup>8</sup> Why do we not carefully close our *eyes* and *ears*, our *mouths*, our *hearts*, and our *houses* to the world? To my great consolation, I always found that the best and most blessed mission houses are those where the good sisters live in silence and retirement. Outside the sacrament of penance, they have nothing to do with confessors but, in all their doubts, they ask for and receive counsel from the motherhouse instead. They do not abuse the sacrament of penance by complaining about their companion sisters’ actions and omissions or by chatting and tattling, but contritely accuse themselves of their own sins and misdeeds before God! They preserve interior peace, do not become the subject of worldly gossip, and keep themselves pure. If the container is not kept carefully closed, good spirits, no matter how powerful they are, will evaporate and grow stale. If the lantern is left open and exposed to the wind, the light will go out. Likewise, the spirit of devotion, of love, and of poverty, the light of faith and of divine illumination—in short, the spirit of the order, the spirit of Jesus—will be extinguished, if, as I said above, we do not carefully close our exterior and interior senses, our doors to the world.

In holy obedience, I earnestly exhort all the sisters to be conscientious regarding enclosure. I fear great misfortune for those who do not follow this admonition and, with no hesitation, listen to all kinds of news from seculars, acquaintances, relatives, and even priests, or love to write letters to outsiders and long to receive them. The door is open if they waste precious time in idle conversations in the parlor

or outside the classroom door, or if they admit seculars into the convent and entertain them while neglecting to serve God by fulfilling the sacred duties of their vocation. They manifest curiosity for the things of the world and try to obtain news from the children in school, or they leave their convent doors unguarded for long periods every day so that anyone can come and go at will. If they do any of these things, their house is *open*. Can they still call themselves religious?

How can they be considered secluded daughters of Mary, who loved virginal solitude and silence, as well as withdrawal and seclusion from the world? Mary strictly observed these virtues her entire life.

As the bridegroom said to the foolish virgins, will not Jesus also say to such secularized sisters, “I do not know you”?<sup>9</sup> Such sisters apparently do not adhere to Jesus, but cling to the world, share joy and sorrow with it, long for and seek after it, love it, pay homage and offer sacrifice to it instead of to God. Alas! It was the world that crucified Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom. Those who love the world are the enemies of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Oh, who would not be terrified by these words of the holy apostle?

Dear Sisters, have no love for the world! Let us be crucified to the world as the world is crucified to us. Let us hate and flee what the world loves and seeks. Let us love and seek what the world flees and hates—Jesus, our Divine Bridegroom, and Mary, the beloved Mother of Our Order, in the quiet of Nazareth. In peaceful retirement from the world, we will be compensated in abundance because that is where the Spirit of God will speak to our heart more audibly and distinctly. By observing enclosure, which is so necessary for us and is the seal of the One who has espoused us, we will remain pure and undefiled by the wicked world. Those sisters who gladly look back to the world and love to associate with it have

only earthly, shameful thoughts and distractions at prayer. They are half-hearted, unenthusiastic about their holy vocation, and filled with confusion. Those sisters who love God and observe interior and exterior seclusion from the world—as our holy rule strictly enjoins—and keep their hearts pure and undefiled will behold God and taste how sweet the Lord is. If Jesus is the treasure of our hearts, we will always love to be with him, and not with the world. Let us take to heart what Jesus so lovingly tells us, “If you do not renounce all things, you cannot be my disciple.”<sup>11</sup> “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees!”<sup>12</sup> “Woe to you if others speak well of you; they have also spoken well of false prophets.”<sup>13</sup> “You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.”<sup>14</sup> “Be glad and rejoice if you are persecuted for my name’s sake, for your reward will be great in heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Education*

Dear Sisters, why do we submit to religious obedience and not let our own will prevail? Why do we renounce property and love of earthly goods and voluntarily live poverty? Why do we remain celibate and separated from the world? Why should we unceasingly try to sanctify ourselves? Is it not that, being free from the cares of this life, we can better meet the needs of the *dear children* as spiritual mothers who meet our Savior in them? This is the purpose of our order and the reason why God called it into existence.

Dear Sisters, let it be our earnest endeavor that the souls of many children will march into heaven with us because it was for their sake that the blood of our Divine Bridegroom flowed on the wood of the cross. Then we will do our part so that God will be fully glorified, honored, and loved. The reign of God will be extended when many virtuous, devout, obedient, and

diligent young women go forth from our schools and to their families. This is our daily prayer.

We must use all our energy for this, just as Jesus did without growing weary until the end of his life. Jesus walked among us, followed by the apostles who suffered poverty, hunger, exposure, persecution, scourging, chains, imprisonment, and even martyrdom, to lead others to God and to save their souls.

Let us never forget the love of Jesus for children, whom he took upon his lap, caressed, and blessed! Of them he said, "Whoever receives one of these little ones in my name receives me."<sup>16</sup> Through all our prayers, Holy Communion, Masses, and practices of penance, let us grow in true wisdom, great humility, and insurmountable patience, whereby we will draw the hearts of the little ones to God as one catches flies with honey. Let us often withdraw into the little chamber of our heart where we can always obtain new strength and help from Jesus. Before classes begin, let us always invoke Jesus, the Divine Friend of Children, to be our teacher. Let us entrust the children to Mary's maternal heart and implore the children's holy guardian angels for their help and support. Let us ask Blessed Peter Fourier, the patron of all the children whom God has entrusted to us, to intercede for us daily. Let us be *mothers* to the dear little ones in our schools, not hired servants!

With regard to our own improvement and perfection, let us fulfill our religious duties so that our devout and edifying life will be the most loving, visible example of what we tell the children in words. Then we will teach with balm and God will bless our work with the little ones. Everything depends on this blessing. We will have nothing to fear because the children, their parents, and those in charge will realize that our order exists for the benefit of humanity and that we sacrifice

ourselves for the dear young people as God expects of us. Even if the children in our schools become very *learned* and *skilled*, if there is no grace, all things are as nothing before God.

Let us often call to mind the example of Jesus, the Divine Friend of Children. Let us instruct and care for the little ones as we would the Divine Child Jesus. Then, because of this love, our sins will be forgotten by God and our joy and blessedness in heaven will be increased in the measure by which we, with the help of God, rescued the souls of children from the world and won them for God. What joy for Jesus and Mary! What consolation will be ours for all eternity if we faithfully fulfill the duties of our holy vocation! Oh, would that all sisters take this to heart! How marvelous the flowering of our order would be! How beneficial and wide its expansion! How many immortal souls would be saved! Once again, let us lovingly work to the best of our ability for the children and young women in our schools and academies because we owe it to God. Our enemies are looking for anything against us.

### *Prayer*

To keep the vows we need many great graces and God desires that we ask for them. Let us *pray* without ceasing, therefore, in accordance with Jesus' cautionary advice and our obligation as religious. Prayer is the most necessary element for our souls, as water is for fish. How many times have we heard it said that, for us, prayer is the ladder, the key, and the gate to heaven? Prayer is true heavenly food and nourishment for the soul that would starve without it. Prayer is a remedy for the sick who desire to recover, joy for the afflicted, strength for the weak, medicine for sinners, delight for the just, and mutual support for the entire Church.

Without zealous prayer, dear Sisters, we will never become perfect. Our hearts remain cold and hard if they are not inflamed and melted in prayer. Without ardent prayer, we will never be united with God because we do not come close to God. We must ascend the mountain with Moses. Without prayer, we will always remain ignorant and sinful people because we do not look at God's perfection or our own defects in the mirror of prayer. Without zealous prayer, our souls receive from the Holy Spirit neither consolation nor refreshment nor caresses, and in the end, they abandon hope or seek a love other than God.

What wonderful and great things were obtained from the loving God through the pleas of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and the others in prayer! Is not God still the same? Can we not obtain similar favors from God through prayer? Jesus promised that if we ask anything in God's name, it will be granted. Dear Sisters, from now on, should we not devote ourselves to prayer with great zeal and draw near to this wellspring of grace at all times?

Let us follow our Divine Bridegroom who loved to pray, often throughout the entire night, and who admonishes us to pray with similar love! How necessary it is for us to pray for *ourselves*, for *our children*, and for our *benefactors*!

Let us say our obligatory prayers above all in spirit and in truth and then make our daily meditation, again in spirit and in truth. Our best preparation for meditation is living throughout the day in accord with our prayer, giving up our imperfections, and taking one step forward daily. Otherwise, we will fall behind and arrive too late for the heavenly wedding banquet!

Through the great sacrifice of atonement, the *Holy Mass*, we become daily sharers in the infinite mercies of Jesus.

Let us also make use of *spiritual reading*. Rodriguez,<sup>17</sup> *Bride*, and the *Imitation of Christ* contain refreshment and instruction for mind and heart. Never cease praying, for if the spirit of devotion decreases in us, everything else slips backward into tepidity and death. Therefore, dear Sisters, watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

### *Penance*

Mindful of our sins and the bitter sufferings of Jesus, our Divine Bridegroom, we do not want to let a day pass by without serious penance, because *that day* on which we do not do penance in addition to prayer is lost to us. At the very beginning of his teaching career, Jesus exclaimed for the whole world to hear, “Do penance! The reign of God is at hand.”<sup>18</sup> Yes, O Jesus, you spoke the truth! Without penance, your reign does not come to us.

For that reason, dear Sisters, let us ponder these words of Jesus and earnestly do penance. Great are the advantages, glorious is the reward that penance brings us. While still alive, we offer to Divine Justice reparation for the sins we have committed and pray daily for their forgiveness. Is this not easier than atoning for them in the next world? God alone knows how long and how painful that will be!

Penance makes our miserable prayer more powerful so that it can rise up to God. Through penance, we drive off the evil spirits, mortify our egoism—the root of all vices—extinguish the heat of inordinate desire, and prepare the way to holiness. Through penance, we obtain for ourselves peaceful and refreshing sleep; we cure many illnesses, strengthen our health, and prolong our life. Through penance, we obtain the gift of tears and remorse, through childlike obedience, peace, and joy of heart. Penance is the salt with which we mortify

vice and bring all virtues to life within us. It strengthens our spirit marvelously and procures for us heavenly consolations. Penance is the wall around chastity and the citadel of sanctity. Penance makes us invincible and glorious in the sight of God and others.

We often read in the life of Jesus, a life filled with voluntary, painful penance, that our Divine Bridegroom was covered with wounds, crowned with thorns, abused, derided, spat upon, torn by scourges, treated worse than malefactors and murderers, and finally crucified. Do we sinners want to be his spouses, to be glorified with him in heaven, to triumph at his side, and not hear of penance or practice it while here on earth?

Let us not deceive ourselves, dear Sisters! Through lifelong penance, we prepare for ourselves a peaceful and blessed death, a merciful judgment, a joyful resurrection, and a blissful eternity. Arise then, beloved Sisters, and diligently do penance! Jesus, Mary, our dear mother, and all the saints lead us on the way of penance and suffering. Let us follow them. This way lasts only a short time and wins for us an everlasting, precious prize! No battle, no victory; no victory, no crown!

To want to be a religious and not do penance is nonsense. I cannot help but weep, and I do not want to stop weeping, over the blindness of those sisters who do not trample underfoot their wretched *pride*. Miserable as they are, they do not want to humble themselves, to give in, and to become obedient. They weep bitter tears over the smallest reproof, no matter how well meant, and perhaps even stir up unrest and agitation. Their unmortified lives scandalize outsiders to whom such behavior is obvious. What will become of such religious here and in eternity? Jesus asks, "How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another?"<sup>19</sup>

Jesus even asserts that these proud spirits have no faith, which is necessary to please God. Oh, how ashamed they will feel! How they will wish to crawl away, if they could, when the divine crucified Savior appears in the clouds bearing the glorious sign of the cross for the judgment that they feared and avoided during their lifetime! On that day, how joyfully and confidently will those sisters, who followed their Savior with humility and penance on earth, lift up their heads!

Due to our past sins and imperfections, all of us have sufficient reason to humble ourselves and to take the last place, always allowing ourselves to be despised because we do not deserve anything better. Let us strive to outdo one another in our daily efforts to become more humble, to become like dear little children, to mortify *vanity*, which drives us to act like Pharisees for human praise. Alas, whatever is not done for God or for the salvation of souls is in vain! Let us earnestly begin to throw out the old leaven that sours the soul and, just as a moth eats through clothing, ruins all our actions and sacrifices in the sight of God.

No less harmful, dear Sisters, is excessive curiosity to know, to have, to do, to taste, to see, to say, to hear, and to read whatever we desire or whatever comes into our hands, even though it is forbidden and regardless of how much God calls and warns us through our conscience, “Let go! Flee!”

Particular mention must be made here of idle talk because we must give an account of every useless word. On the Last Day, we will be judged by our speech. What a serious thing that is, and yet, how often an inquisitive soul pours itself out and becomes empty and desolate within! If the soul, like salt, loses its savor, what good is it?<sup>20</sup>

It has been my experience for many years that pride and excessive curiosity are like two wild animals causing the greatest harm to the dear sisters and inflicting the deepest

wounds. Our first mother Eve left us an example that should be a warning to us. Into what misery her excessive curiosity and pride plunged her and all of us!

I have always found that I could accomplish the least with those sisters who had surrendered themselves to pride and excessive curiosity. How could it be any different? Such sisters pray without interior devotion. Lacking fear of God and childlike love, they obey only exteriorly and out of human respect. Their idle chatter and laughter testify to their lack of recollection. Since their work is not done out of love for God, it neither gives glory to God nor is it successful. Even if their work appears brilliant and glorious in the eyes of the world but lacks the balm of the Holy Spirit, I have yet to see one child drawn to true devotion by such unmortified sisters. How could they accomplish anything, since they themselves are wanting in faith and grace? How they neglect themselves and the children whom God has entrusted to them for their education and character formation! Who could ever remedy or make up for this?

From this you can see, dear Sisters, how excessive curiosity and worldly vanity, which are rooted in despicable pride, are the principal causes for the decline and disintegration of the order in general and for the downfall of an individual sister in particular. Every day of our lives, therefore, let us work against these two monsters until we have destroyed them by humility and through the sacred wounds of Jesus. Oh, how much the Savior had to suffer for this! Do we want to renew those unspeakable sufferings? Oh, never! How renewed and beautiful everything will be when we become humble and mortified sisters! How much peace in our hearts, how much peace in our houses, how much peace in death! How blessed in eternity!

## Chapter

For this reason, the sisters should conscientiously hold the prescribed chapter of faults that is so hated by Satan. They should courageously and humbly accuse themselves, accept a penance, and seriously endeavor to correct what has been censured. This is truly the school of perfection, and God will not judge whatever has been judged there!

The school of perfection also requires that each sister conscientiously observe the *silence* enjoined by the holy rule, as well as the *daily order* and *religious practices*. Each sister is to fulfill the duties of her vocation punctually, for then our religious life will proceed like clockwork where everything follows in an orderly manner, minute by minute. Peace and perfection depend largely upon this. How often and how much I have written to the sisters about this—if only it were carried out! Order comes from God and leads to God. Disorder in our duties brings disorder and confusion into the soul. It will never go well for talkative characters.

We will not be punished for not having done many and great things. We will be judged instead on whether we did everything with a good intention and prudent zeal and if we performed every action in obedience and in accordance with the daily order and the duties of our vocation. Only then will our works be good in the sight of God. A sister who adds a second talent to her one talent by faithfully fulfilling her required tasks with a good intention and simplicity of heart and in conformity with the daily order will occupy one of the first places in heaven. However, another sister with five talents who disobediently uses them as she pleases and does not keep the prescribed daily order may gain much in her own eyes but will stand before God empty-handed.

Let us, therefore, be faithful handmaids of our dear Lord and conscientiously observe the conventual daily order. Our life is so short. Let us use our time to gather treasures of good works so that we can take them with us. The night of *death* comes when we can do no more. Like a thief in the night, the Lord of life will come and call us away when we least expect, so let us always be ready for death and eternity. We have only one soul and, if it is lost, we cannot exchange it for another. Death is bitter; we see this in our dying sisters. Only penance and good works can make it more bearable for us. We want to perform each of our works as if it were our last. The all-knowing God's *judgment* is strict—penance and good works done in obedience will stay the arm of God. The fiery pains of *hell* are dreadful and without end. Penance and good works performed in obedience extinguish this fire and change the torments of hell into the eternal joys of heaven.

Heaven is filled with innocent souls and penitent souls. If we are no longer innocent, we must try to reach heaven with the penitents by doing holy penance ourselves. We must endeavor to do penance all our life by observance of the holy vows, by humiliations of every kind, by exact fulfillment of the duties of our vocation, and by adherence to the daily order. Our beloved Mother Mary, whom we invoke daily, will help us!

Finally, I beg, admonish, and implore all *superiors* to adhere steadfastly to the *motherhouse*, which God has so marvelously prepared for us. By this you will avoid many sufferings and sins. *Nothing is to be changed* in the mission houses; nothing new is to be introduced with regard to the daily order or the furnishings of house and school. Superiors must never forget that they are not in charge of an ordinary, middle-class household, but that, by virtue of holy obedience, God has given them the *administration of a holy cause* and of God's house, not in order to do as they please but, as faithful

stewards, to act in holy obedience and in accordance with God's will. Superiors must conscientiously give an account of this. Each evening they must take the keys of the house into their own keeping. May no one share the fate of the unjust steward in the Gospel!

All superiors will bear in mind that *discipline and order on their missions* depend largely on their obedience to the motherhouse, their devotion and vigilance, their diligence, their love for strict conventual order, and their observance of holy poverty. Nevertheless, they must also remember that these can be lost through their fault. When the eye is deficient, the whole body is deficient. They will have to render an account to God and the higher superior for every single item in their houses.

Superiors will see to it that they take counsel with their companion sisters in matters of importance. They are to shine as a *light and model* for their companion sisters and set a good example in everything that they ask of them. This is the most lasting encouragement.

Imitating the example of our Divine Bridegroom, superiors will govern more by motherly love, true humility of heart, and gentleness than by a haughty and repulsive manner. On the other hand, out of human respect, they may not shy away from correcting faults or from punishing even the smallest failing. As long as the sisters observe *prayer and silence* and pay attention to *little things*, all will be well in matters of greater importance, and one day God will say to them, "Come, good and faithful servants!"<sup>21</sup> Jesus, who placed this cross upon the superiors' shoulders, will help them to carry it, and our good Mother Mary will lovingly assist them. Let this be your consolation at all times! Do not lose courage, but place childlike confidence in God who will take up the struggle for you!

By virtue of holy obedience, I call *all sisters who are not superiors* and beg you in the names of Jesus and Mary to keep God before your eyes at all times. Prove that you are obedient and good-natured in serving God, as the fourth commandment requires. Believe me, being a superior is a heavy burden with great responsibility. Take care, therefore, that your superiors do not govern you with sighs, which would not redound to your salvation. Endeavor through love and obedience to ease the heavy burden of being a superior! Are we not all members of one spiritual family where we are cared for in life and even after death? Only where there is harmony and love will you find blessing and success. Discord is destructive.

Teaching Sisters, often take to heart that you must look after the garden of the Lord and care for the favorites of Jesus. Begin school when the clock strikes and close the day in the same manner because the children must see and learn punctuality and order from us. We must give an account to God for every quarter of an hour. Otherwise, how much time we would let pass by idly! Prepare daily for your important task, a work for angels that requires great diligence and much grace from God. Never strike a child, but take children who misbehave to the pastor instead. With a childlike, sunny disposition, you will be able to achieve much with the children.

Through prayer, penance, and a humble, edifying example for the love of God, all sisters who fulfill household duties must sincerely strive to help and support those who are in school with the difficult duties of their vocation of the education and character formation of the children. We all constitute one spiritual family and share in the same contribution made by the entire order. For this reason, we must also work together toward our chief goal so that the children in school and the boarding pupils whom God has entrusted to us not only grow in knowledge, but most of all, become more devout and well-

mannered before God and others. This is what our holy rule requires of us. This is what God expects and asks of all of us. Unspeakably great will be my joy if I find all the dear children like this when God leads me safely across the ocean again and back to you.

Dear Spiritual Daughters, I have placed before your eyes in a very succinct manner something of the spirit of our order and now I hasten to close, even though I still would have much more to tell you.

Above all, in Jesus' name, I humbly beg all my companion sisters to forgive my offenses and omissions. Oh, that each of you would take it upon yourself to make good what I have spoiled, to accomplish what I have neglected! It was no small burden weighing upon me until now and, with God's help, it will go better in the future. Have mercy on me, dear Sisters, and pray for me! Whether God prolongs my life or lets me die, pray for me, and remember my poor soul.

Do not lose courage. Jesus Christ will be at your side and help you overcome all difficulties. If the cross presses heavily at times, hasten to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Pray and tell Jesus of your needs and cares, perhaps in the stillness of nightly adoration. You will never leave without light, consolation, and help. There were times when I, too, could find help in no other way and now, for the greater honor and glory of God, I may reveal to you that God has never refused me a petition I made for you, my Sisters, concerning God's holy cause. I often complained to God about things I did not dare mention to you because you were not strong enough to bear it. You can see with your own eyes how God's mighty arm founded, guided, and protected this work with divine strength to this day. Even our enemies loudly acknowledge it. *I* could not have done this.

See how three of us, poor and forsaken, began this work of God with supernatural faith and trust.<sup>22</sup> How many virgins God's love has now brought together! How God has blessed this work!

Even the great ones of earth refused us nothing because God wanted it. There are now 22 houses with our sisters and two with candidates.<sup>23</sup> We are at home wherever we are. In eight houses, Jesus dwells in the Blessed Sacrament. Not long ago, God visibly saved one of these houses from the fury of flames that destroyed a nearby church. The Blessed Sacrament also had to take refuge in the poor home of our sisters and has remained in their midst ever since.<sup>24</sup> More than 5,000 children have been entrusted to us for care and for education. All of this has happened in a short span of time—not even 14 years have elapsed since the foundation of our order. Without funds or resources, we have been provided with a beautiful, large, and suitable motherhouse that cost 100,000 florin.<sup>25</sup> Just as Jesus provided food for the people in the desert, food for 135 handmaids has also been provided in a wondrous manner.

The Divine Bridegroom called 15 sisters home from this valley of tears.<sup>26</sup> In a very touching manner, they rejoiced at the hour of death, devoutly gave thanks for being allowed to die as religious, and promised to remember us before the throne of God. How happy these sisters must be with God and in the company of our blessed founders [George Michael] Wittmann and [Francis Sebastian] Job!

Consider, dear Sisters, how the infinitely merciful and loving God saved us from so many perils and hardships. When very close to death, your poor spiritual mother—who writes this now—was restored to life on March 7, 1840.<sup>27</sup> God continues to give me so many graces and so much time so that

while I am still fully conscious, I can put everything into proper order before I die.

God has also arranged everything with regard to our holy rule. Blessed Peter Fourier's *Notre Dame Rule* was approved by Rome and has regulated our *interior* life up to now. All of us have made our holy profession according to this rule. Of course, our *external* affairs, especially those regarding the missions, were reformed and adapted to the pressing needs of our times in accordance with the spirit and intent of our founder, [Francis Sebastian] Job of blessed memory. This enables us to come to the help of God's favorites, the dear children, even in small places.

God has lovingly arranged everything concerning this work and has allowed us to gather sufficient experience. After successfully accomplishing our mission and returning to our beloved country, we will present to our archbishop<sup>28</sup> the necessary additions and changes in our old rule—changes necessitated by our present school system and our times. At his wise discretion, this kind pastoral prelate, who has been sent to us by God, will then present the entire rule to the Holy See, whereby God will bring this matter to a close through our holy Catholic Church.

All this, dear Sisters, ought to encourage us to childlike trust, heartfelt thanks, and burning love of God, who has been so infinitely good to us poor creatures. Yes, dear Sisters, let us begin again to serve the Triune God all our lives with joy, to obey God, to love God above all, as we will do eternally in our heavenly homeland.

Inspired by supernatural faith that God guides souls through superiors, you have placed your trust in me. Many of you have kept nothing from me, but laid open before me the most intimate secrets of your hearts. You need never regret this, dear Sisters. It will be a great consolation for you on your

deathbed as it was for M. Ambrosia of blessed memory.<sup>29</sup> This has made the guidance of your souls much easier for me and all will be buried in my heart with me. Until then, it will be an incentive for me to pray all the more fervently for those who are like these candid children and to love them even more ardently.

Neither the ocean nor death will loosen or sever the sacred bond of love in Jesus, which the Holy Spirit has wound around our hearts; I hope it will unite us eternally in the world beyond, in the land of the saints. I can offer you only my poor gratitude for such undeserved love, but God will reward you abundantly for it.

Never forget, dear Sisters, how much you owe your spiritual father and co-founder of the work of God.<sup>30</sup> He taught and formed all of you with kindness and simplicity of heart. He taught you how to pass through the dreadful desert full of precipices. With God's grace, he guided you securely on the narrow path of the religious state. Even if you are far from the motherhouse, he still acts as a *spiritual father* to you and the children. Be grateful, dear Sisters, and pray that God will allow you to keep this support for a long time. Remain devout, loyal, and obedient children. Never forget your duties toward him, especially when he stands there, bowed down by unspeakable suffering and labor, and assailed by the weaknesses and infirmities of old age. He has devoted all his youthful energy to you, renounced earthly gain, and kept his eyes on higher things. Gratefully offer him a helping hand in all his needs and reverently fulfill God's commandment. As his last wish, Fr. [Francis Sebastian] Job asked this of me. If I can no longer fulfill the promise that I made to him, please take care of it for me, my good and dearly loved Sisters.

You should know this, too, dear Sisters, that our Reverend Father is now doubly in need of strength from above.

In addition to his apostolic works in convent and school, he has been entrusted with the management of *all our external affairs*. (He has been confirmed as our *confessor* by the archiepiscopal ordinariate.) These responsibilities are many and often very difficult, especially in our times. Pray then, dear Sisters, and do not bring any suffering to the order. The burden will be increasingly crushing until God allows me or my future lawful successor to take some small part of it from him—however and whenever God wills.

Should it happen that our many powerful enemies, visible and invisible, rise up to remove the cornerstone in order to bring about the collapse of the building, oh then, dear Sisters, remain firmly united. Do as the first Christians did when Peter was in prison for the sake of Jesus. Day and night, the Christian community prayed to the Almighty for him, and his chains were broken. They recovered their spiritual father in a miraculous manner.<sup>31</sup> O pray, dear Sisters, pray without ceasing! In all your needs, besiege the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Where there is no human help, God's help is still possible. Place your trust in God alone and you will not fall into ruin.

Sister M. Foreria [Schiesser] has already become acquainted with all convent affairs. She will take my place here at the motherhouse until God brings me, the poorest of the poor, back again. She has been confirmed in this position by the archbishop, and God will take care of the rest.

In this difficult time, the adorable will of God has opened the path for us to a mission in America! The sisters whom I will accompany to St. Marys [Pennsylvania], and who themselves asked to go, are the professed Sisters, *M. Magdalena* [Steiner], *Mary* [Weinzierl], *Seraphine* [von Pronath], and *Caroline* [Friess],<sup>32</sup> and the Novices, *M. Aloysia* [Schmid], *Alexandra* [Rückl], *Zita* [Wittmann], *Agatha*

[Löffler], and *Emmerana* [Koch].<sup>33</sup> The candidates, Eugenia Asmus<sup>34</sup> and Crescentia Schaup,<sup>35</sup> are also eager to go.

I solemnly commend all the sisters to the most *Holy Trinity*. May God the Father care for you all and keep you steadfast and faithful in your holy vocation! May God the Son deliver you from all evil of sin and be the *way* you walk, the *truth* you follow, and the *life* you lead! May the Holy Spirit preserve you in love and grace! May *Mary*, the Mother of Divine Grace and the Mother of Our Order, take you all into her loving, maternal heart and stand by you in life and in death! May your holy *guardian angels* accompany you, all the children in our schools, and the young women in our boarding schools on every path “lest you strike your foot against a stone.”<sup>36</sup>

In the most pure, most loving, and most consoling hearts of Jesus and Mary, let us daily greet one another, surmount obstacles, and seek counsel and refreshment! May our holy fathers, *Augustine* and *Peter Fourier*, intercede for you so that our schools and boarding schools may prosper!

I will never forget you. You know, my dear Spiritual Daughters, that I love you deeply. Tearfully abiding in spirit at the foot of the cross, I will continue to pray for you daily to God, our heavenly Father, as I have always done. As your spiritual mother, I bless you daily. If God calls me while I am on the ocean or in America (or whenever and wherever God wills), if we do not meet again in this valley of tears, and if God does not cast me aside but accepts me as the least of all, I will never forget you and the dear children before the throne of God in the land of rest and eternal peace.

Dear Sisters, although I often seemed serious in my dealings with you, I loved you with all my heart as a mother loves her child. Believe me, the separation from you is very hard, but the dear Lord who left heaven for the sake of us poor

sinner is calling! (Praise God for me so that I will be counted worthy.)

Pray for us, dear Sisters, that we may cross the raging sea and reach St. Marys to lay the foundation of holiness for a new motherhouse of the order there. The forsaken children to whose help we are coming, together with their angels, will respond with joy and gratitude through their prayers. If God no longer allows us to be called here in our own country<sup>37</sup> but leads all of us across the ocean instead, we will serve God there for the rest of our lives.

Walk in God's presence, my dear Sisters, and you will be perfect!

In closing, my dear Sisters, let us love one another until we meet again after a little while, either here or beyond the grave!

May the strength and blessing of God be with you always!  
Amen!

Long live Jesus and Mary!

Your poor Mother,  
*Mary Theresa of Jesus*

From our Motherhouse in Munich  
Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, May 30, 1847

*Letters of Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger*, translation and notes by Mary Ann Kuttner, SSND, vol. 6, *Mission to North America, 1847-1859* (Elm Grove, Wisconsin, 2008), 17-43.

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1. Carl August von Reisach (1800-69), Archbishop of Munich and Freising (1856-56)
  2. *Matthew* 5:48
  3. *Matthew* 7:2
  4. See *Matthew* 25:31-46.
  5. See *Acts* 5:1-11.

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6. See *Matthew* 6:28.
  7. An extern was employed by the sisters to take care of necessary business outside the enclosure.
  8. *Matthew* 10:16
  9. *Matthew* 25:12
  10. See *James* 4:4.
  11. See *Luke* 14:33.
  12. *Matthew* 16:6
  13. See *Luke*, 6:26.
  14. See *John* 16:20.
  15. See *Matthew* 5:11-12.
  16. See *Mark* 9:37.
  17. Alphonsus Rodriguez, *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas* (Seville, 1609), trans. *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues* (Chicago, 1929)
  18. See *Matthew* 4:17.
  19. *John* 5:44
  20. See *Matthew* 5:13.
  21. See *Matthew* 25:21.
  22. Caroline Gerhardinger, Barbara Weinzierl, and Maria Blass began a common religious life in Neunburg vorm Wald on October 24, 1833.
  23. At the time this letter was written, sisters were at the motherhouse in Munich and the missions in Neunburg vorm Wald, Schwarzhofen, Hohenthann, Amberg, the Au Suburb of Munich, Spalt, Wolfratshausen, Regenstauf, Reisbach, Ingolstadt, Hahnbach, Pleystein, Tölz, Lauterbach, Freising, Eggenfelden, Stamsried, Adelshofen, Aidenbach, Laufen, and Schneiding (now Oberschneiding). Candidates staffed the missions in Pfaffenhofen on the Ilm River and Giesing near Munich. All of these places are in Bavaria.
  24. After fire destroyed the church in Regenstauf in 1846, the parish used the convent chapel as its church until 1850. See M. Traugott Schindlbeck, *Vom Orden der Armen Schulschwestern von Unserer Lieben Frau* (Typescript, Rome) 289.
  25. \$40,000 in American currency at the time
  26. Sisters M. Clara Bräu, M. Josepha Aichinger, M. Afra Kuchenbauer, M. Michaela Niedermeier, M. Caroline Lechner, M. Monica Wenzl, M. Thecla Brauneis, M. Valentina Erlmeier, M. Innocentia (Corona) Fischhold, M. Sebalda Meierhofer, M. Ambrosia Hössl, M. Regina Bauer, M. Aquinata Amann, M. Bernarda Hümmel, and M. Gabriela Eder had died by the time this letter was written. Sister M. Ambrosia was 28 when she died and the oldest of these 15 sisters.
  27. See Benilda Dix, SSND, *Love Cannot Wait* (Milwaukee: School Sisters of Notre Dame, 1987) 57, for an account of this cure through the intercession of Fr. Francis de Sales Handwercher, who was believed to have had the power of healing.
  28. Archbishop Reisach
  29. Sister M. Ambrosia Hössl died in Regenstauf on March 16, 1846.
  30. Matthias Siegert.

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31. See *Acts* 12:3-17.
  32. These four sisters accompanied Mother Theresa to America in 1847.
  33. After their profession, Sisters M. Aloysia Schmid, M. Alexandra Rückl, and M. Zita Wittmann, as well as Novice M. Agatha Löffler, arrived in America with the second missionary group on March 24, 1848. Sister M. Emmerana Koch arrived with the third missionary group on January 8, 1849.
  34. Eugenia Asmus never went to America.
  35. Crescentia Schaup, a candidate from the mission in the Au Suburb of Munich, accompanied Mother Theresa and the first group of sisters to America, but was never received into the congregation.
  36. *Psalm* 91:12
  37. On March 23, 1847, the Bavarian Royal Government issued a decree subjecting the profession of vows in convents of women religious to the decision of a state commissioner. Candidates continued to be received into the novitiate, but there were no profession ceremonies in 1846 or 1847.