

You And Yours

Practical Talks on Home Life. Part 5 - Amusements and the Higher Life

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Talk 13. AMUSEMENTS.

One of the chief problems confronting young people at the present time is that of amusement. Parents also are frequently as puzzled as their children in this matter.

Young people must have amusement. If they do not have the right kind, they will have the harmful kind. It is all very well for parents and elders to say "don't do this" and "don't do that." Such advice or direction is waste of breath unless what they may do instead is also pointed out. It is not enough to forbid harmful entertainment; what is safe and profitable must be provided.

Parents and pastors often thunder against unwholesome movies and dangerous lascivious dances. But young folks will dance and young folks will go to the movies. The thing to do is to give the young folks dances of the right sort, under the right auspices. Even now, the world of entertainment, in moving pictures or other forms, has its good things. It is for us to be on the lookout for them, and to recommend them to others.

To forbid and forbid and again to forbid, without pointing out an alternative, is worse than useless. This is beginning to be realized nowadays. Pastors and parents everywhere are striving to furnish safe entertainment for the young. But there are some who have not yet awakened to the necessity of providing, but continue the old plan of forbidding. Such good people are astonished at the futility of their efforts.

I knew a pastor who entered into the social life of his people, encouraging good plays, frequent dances and "sociables," and urging parents to attend these affairs, with the result that the young people of his congregation had so much wholesome amusement that they never thought of indulging in anything questionable. These entertainments brought the people together, helped to make them acquainted, enabled many fine young men to meet attractive young women of their own Faith, and the result was an increased number of good Catholic marriages.

How often do we hear a Catholic girl say that she has no opportunities of meeting Catholic young men! And time and again, when I have spoken to young men about marrying Catholic girls, their reply was that nothing would please them more, but that they do not have the good fortune of meeting them socially.

Many of our finest Catholic girls accept the eager attentions of men, not of the Faith, who recognize their sterling worth. Meanwhile, our Catholic young men marry girls not of the Faith, while all around them are Catholic girls who would make them splendid wives.

Let us be candid. Other churches can teach us a lesson in the value of social functions. With them, perhaps, such things are overdone, because they have little else. But one good effect which we might profitably strive for, is just this encouraging of friendship which tends to hold a community together. In our large cities especially is this necessary. It is almost impossible for young Catholic men and women to get acquainted in our city parishes. They attend Mass on Sundays and return home, and the people they meet are as so many trees in a forest.

Time and again, I have had a young man say to me: "Father, I wish I could meet some nice girls of our Faith. I want to marry and I don't want to have a mixed marriage, but how am I to get introduced to our Catholic girls? We do not have any social affairs, or anything of that kind to bring the young fellows and girls together."

And I have had our girls say to me something like this: "You blame me, Father, for keeping company with a non-Catholic. But what am I to do? I never meet our Catholic young men; we have nothing to bring us together."

It is all so true. In Catholic countries there are a thousand and one occasions for social acquaintance. But here, in this land of all religions and none, there are few or no occasions when Catholic meets Catholic socially. What is the result? Many mixed marriages and broken lives.

Parents should not leave this matter to the initiative of the pastor. They should get together in groups, of their own accord, and encourage home dances, good entertainments and plays, and sociability generally. I have known districts where religious 'blue laws' reigned, and where, in consequence, the young people went to the devil.

Some people think that piety is gloom, and that religion must be stiff-necked. Our divine Lord did not think so. He worked His first miracle at a social gathering, and for the purpose of adding to its cheer. Piety means cheerfulness in doing good. Religion is intended to make us serve God cheerfully. Young people can be saints at a dance as well as at their devotions.

Proper dances and proper amusements call for Christian restraint and virtue. They may become the means, under right circumstances, of furthering God's designs in us. The thing to do is, not to discourage or condemn amusements, but to surround them with Christian safeguards and make them as attractive as possible.

The place to begin amusements is in the home. Some parents create such an air of restraint about the home that the children, old and young, cannot get out fast enough. On the contrary, the home should be so attractive, that only occasionally should the children care to seek their pleasure elsewhere. Music, books, games, conversation, should be cultivated in the family circle. Parents should strive to make the children feel decidedly "at home."

Some parents think that their chief duty in life is to recite a litany of "don'ts." They are surprised that the children fail to appreciate this form of parental devotion. It is the doing that counts, not the "don'ts." If the parents provide good home attractions, recourse to the "don'ts" will become unnecessary. In addition to home attractions, the parents should not neglect the social entertainment of their children. Visits to friends whose influence and homes meet with the approval of parents should be encouraged, and when friends visit our children, we should make things as pleasant as possible for them.

Some parents embarrass their children by their treatment of young visitors. Very well. Let them go on doing that, but they should not be surprised if their children draw away from them and from the

home influence. A mother especially should do all in her power to help the young people entertain their guests. Let children be strictly obliged to consult their mother before inviting visitors, but to treat even a child guest inconsiderately in the home does harm to one's own child as well as to the others.

Of course, there is a measure in everything. There may be excess and abuse in this matter of entertainment, as in everything else. But we should not set ourselves against amusement because of these abuses. Parents can best take a stand against the excesses not by drastic prohibitory measures, but by a heart to heart talk with their children. In this way, they will give themselves the comfort of knowing that they have fulfilled their duty, and done their best in a very important matter.

Children sometimes break loose and run wild in spite of efforts of their parents, but they are much more likely to return to the right path, sadder but wiser, if their minds recall pleasant home memories. No care or supervision is ever entirely lost. The best efforts at times may seem to be wasted, but it is only apparently so.

In a thousand ways, and most unexpectedly, the pains taken with children will bear fruit. If parents do not meet with present success in their efforts for those dear to them, they should not be discouraged. If they do their part faithfully, they will have no cause to regret it.

With young children, boys and girls, healthy outdoor sports should be encouraged. Nothing can replace God's playground, the open. Why be afraid of a few bruises or scratches or soiled clothes? Some parents get into hysterics if a child comes home crying, and forbid the little one to play thereafter with those bad companions! Nothing could be worse. Parents should teach their boys and girls to give and take. Their health and development are worth all the bruises and tears of their growing years.

As children grow older, parents should keep an eye on where they go. They may thus prevent harm by anticipating it. When parents forbid son or daughter to do this or that, to go here or there, they should be sure beforehand that the prohibition is advisable and practicable. Then they should insist absolutely on its fulfillment.

Growing boys and girls learn very quickly whether orders mean anything or not. Many parents are themselves to blame for their wayward children. They command and threaten and fume, but never really insist on anything. Commanding and threatening talk is of little or no use with a boy or girl, a young man or woman. Action is the language they understand and respect. If a father tells them to keep away from such and such a place, if a mother commands them to avoid such and such company, and they do not obey, the parents must kindly but firmly let them see from experience that it does not pay to disregard parental instructions. What that action should be will depend on the character of the parents, as well as on that of the children.

As children approach maturity, they should be allowed more and more latitude. If they have been brought up properly, there will be little reason to fear that they will abuse their enlarged freedom, which should not be curtailed, unless their amusements are harmful, or interfere with their duties and prospects.

There is, for example, in some quarters, a puritanical notion that card playing is sinful. Card playing at home for amusement and competition in skill is a perfectly proper social entertainment, even on Sunday. It may be necessary to distinguish between card playing and gambling and between various degrees of gambling. 'Excessive Gambling' is playing for stakes with the risk of losing what may

be required for the maintenance of oneself and family. If a man runs the risk of causing his wife or children to suffer for what he may lose at cards, card playing for him is wrong.

To play for small sums, in order to add interest to the game, is not wrong. One may legitimately spend some of one's money on amusement. The danger always lies in going to excess. But if we condemned things because of their possible abuse, we should have to stop almost everything in the world. Moderation is necessary in everything. A Catholic young man or woman should certainly be able to exercise moderation. Please do not understand me as advocating a form of amusement that is not 'in keeping with good morals'. Card playing among friends for little or no stakes, can be an innocent home amusement.

Home dances, or dances in private halls, under good supervision, are greatly to be encouraged. Such parties can be very beneficial socially, for young people. If they have something of the kind to look forward to, they will have less temptation to go to questionable places where so many meet their ruin.

We must take human nature as it is, and conditions as we find them, and then do our best under the circumstances. Dancing is widely popular among the young. Dancing of the right sort is innocent and beneficial. Instead of condemning it fruitlessly, let us safeguard it and make it the means of serving a good social purpose among our people. There are 'bad' dances, and there are bad effects from good dances. That does not condemn dancing any more than unfortunate marriages condemn matrimony. There are good dances with good results. We should encourage these.

Parents should endeavor to identify themselves with their children's amusements. By interesting themselves in what the young people like, they can add to their pleasure and safeguard it. In these days, the more that parents share the amusements of their children, the better. It is thus that mother and father keep in touch and know just what is best to say and do on occasion.

Particular care should be exercised in regard to the theatre and the movies. One bad play may set a young person on the road to ruin. 'The theatrical business has many men of fine ideals and high principles in it, who seek to make the drama uplifting.' They should be encouraged.

But unfortunately, some theatre managers have appeared of late who seek patronage by pandering to the passions and weaknesses of humanity. I know of some actors under such managers who have renounced large salaries, because they feel degraded in filling the roles assigned them. The number of vile stage folk is, however, great enough to supply this polluted kind of performance. It is not only soul-killing, but happiness killing as well. The misfortune of it is that it parades under the name of art. It should be avoided as the plague.

In general, it is very hard to be specific in regard to amusements. But on one thing we can be specific. If we find that any game or diversion or entertainment is the cause or occasion of sin for us, we should drop it. If, after any amusement, we feel less like looking into the face of God, or our own mother, we should keep away from it thereafter.

The principal purpose of amusement is to give rest and recreation to fit us for the burdens of life. If we find that a certain recreation interferes with our duties, our responsibilities, our self-respect, we should let it alone.

Like everything else, amusement is a creature of God. It is intended to further our welfare here and our eternal welfare hereafter. And, like everything that God has given us, no matter how good, it

may be misused. It is our part to enjoy the good things that God gives us in a way that will show our gratitude and draw us closer to him.

Not prayer only, but amusement in due season and of the right sort may help us to save our souls. Indeed, it is a form of prayer when we take it properly and with the right motives. By having reverence for God and His holy law in all that we do, we may turn to account every action of the day. Whether we eat or drink, play or pray, if we do it as we should it becomes a means of our serving God and saving our souls.

Saint Aloysius was engaged at a game of checkers on a certain occasion, when he was asked by one of his companions what he would do if he knew he was to die in five minutes. "I would keep right on playing," he answered. That was because he did everything in the right way, — the way that makes everything a prayer.

Talk 14. YOUNG MEN AND THE HIGHER LIFE.

Some men have a strong inclination to do noble things. They are not satisfied with being ordinary. They are not content with limiting themselves to what they are obliged to do.

We see this frequently in the father of a family who makes unusual sacrifices for the welfare and happiness of his wife and children. Such a man often denies himself things which he likes and is entitled to, but which he is glad to do without, for the benefit of those whom he loves. We observe it again in the young man who, out of devotion to father and mother, foregoes many pleasures he might reasonably enjoy. Especially do we notice it in time of war, when men volunteer for disagreeable and dangerous service for love of country.

If a man desires to do something out of the ordinary, something notable, for love of friends, family or country, should he not desire to do something notable for God? Most men can do this in their own families, or among their friends, or in business, by being what God counsels them to be. The father of a family, the husband, the son, the friend can do much for God by being the right kind of father, husband, son, or friend.

For most men, that is all God asks. If they succeed in living their social and business life in a manner pleasing to God, they will be saints in heaven. But although this is enough, and all that is possible for many men, there are others to whom God gives the opportunity of being distinguished in His service. As a government has posts of distinction in its army and its courts, so has God.

In the Great War (of 1914-1918), our government called for picked men to volunteer for arduous service. Many responded heroically. The Church of God is always at war with the world. It needs volunteers for special service. The great body of Christian men form the army of the Lord. They are doing good work for God and country by keeping the commandments. But the army of the Lord calls also for special workers to be officers and to aid the army in doing its work.

A body of soldiers is of little use unless it has a good officer in command. The man back of a gun cannot do much without ammunition and food. Great importance is attached to the commissariat department in the army. If food and officers fail, the army goes to pieces.

The army of the Lord needs officers, commissioned and non-commissioned. It wants priests and brothers. Are you so situated that you can hearken to the call? And have you the desire to do something special in the service of God Almighty? Do you want to be distinguished in God's service? Let us begin with the priesthood.

The question is put to the youth attending school, and to the man who has finished his education and is unmarried — have you a strong inclination to serve God as a priest? It means a clean heart, a good head and a real desire to show one's love for God by a life of service and sacrifice. The married man, who cannot consider this matter for himself, may have a boy who is good and clean and intelligent, whom he would like to see a priest some day.

The first step is to pray; then comes a talk with the parish priest, or with some priest in whom the young man can confide. God will bless the family that gives Him one of its own flesh and blood for the Sanctuary. But the matter must depend primarily upon the boy himself. A father must not persuade his son to join the priesthood. The call must come from God. But father and mother can help a vocation by their own good life, by the respect they show for the priesthood, and by directing the boy's thoughts to the sublimity of a priestly career. It is often the good example of a father or mother that develops a vocation to the priesthood.

For those who are called to it, the priesthood is the highest honor a human being can receive. A priest is a companion of Christ, as were the Apostles. Christ still lives, and will always live, in His Church. He is doing now for the world by the priesthood precisely what He did for the people of Palestine when He was on earth.

Furthermore, a priest is the personal representative of Jesus Christ among men. When he baptizes, it is in the name of Christ. When he forgives sin in the confessional, it is as the ambassador of Christ. When he celebrates Holy Mass, he does so as Christ. At the consecration, the priest does not say: "This is the body of Christ," but he speaks as Christ Himself, and says: "This is My Body." When the priest preaches, he does not preach his own doctrine, but the teachings of Christ.

In all his ministrations, therefore, the priest is another Christ, as it were. What a sublime dignity! What an honor is conferred on a young man who is called to be a priest! It is an honor not only for himself, but for his parents and family and friends.

But if it is an honor, it is also a sacrifice. Christ left His home in heaven and came into this world to suffer and die for us. The priest leaves home and offers his life to suffering and service for the salvation of the souls redeemed by his Master, Jesus Christ. Hence, it is only young men of generous heart and noble purpose who respond to the call of Christ to come and follow Him as a priest.

Any young man who desires to distinguish himself by doing something special for God may become a priest if he has the intelligence and virtue required. And what is the degree of intelligence that is requisite? About the same as that necessary for the practice of law or medicine or any of the learned professions.

One must be prepared for a long course of studies. A priest must be so well educated that he can meet men of the learned professions on their own ground and always uphold the Faith. He requires a knowledge of literature, science, history, philosophy and theology. As a rule, the priest is one of the best informed men in the place where he lives.

In addition to knowledge, a priest must also have virtue. Indeed, of the two, virtue is the more necessary. A virtuous priest with moderate learning is preferable to a learned priest with scant virtue. But, thank God, it is characteristic of the priesthood that virtue and learning are combined.

A young man, therefore, who wishes to use this short and uncertain life to do something splendid for God, can carry out his purpose by dedicating himself to the priesthood. In that way, he will not

only secure his own salvation, but will help others to attain the blessedness, which our Lord came on earth to bestow on mankind.

We shall now consider the vocation of a brother. A brother may be considered a non-commissioned officer in the army of the Lord. An army would be dreadfully handicapped without its non-commissioned officers. And so would the Church be at a dreadful loss without her brotherhoods.

There are some brotherhoods which constitute an order in themselves, like the Christian Brothers, devoting their lives to teaching and to training boys and young men to a career of virtue and usefulness.

There are other brotherhoods which are attached to religious orders of priests to help them in their work. There are Franciscan Brothers, Benedictine Brothers, Dominican Brothers and Jesuit Brothers, not to mention others. These Brothers take the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience just the same as the priests of the order. They share all the privileges of the order, and are as truly religious as the priests themselves.

Many of the great missionaries were accompanied by brothers in their journeys to convert people to the true Faith. The brother thus shares in all the merit of the missionary, and enables him to attend exclusively to priestly duties.

In the monastery or rectory, the brother attends to all the domestic affairs. As women are excluded from the houses of religious orders of men, all the work ordinarily done by women in the home is done by the brothers. But, besides the help they afford the priests, they have also all the means of sanctifying themselves which the priests enjoy — prayer, daily Mass and Communion, meditation, pious reading, frequent instructions, and the good example of the cloister generally.

Any man who is unmarried and who has no one depending on him for support may aspire to be a brother. (For fuller information, see the recently published book, *Convent Life, the Meaning of a Religious Vocation*, by Martin J. Scott, S. J.)

An education is not necessary. If a man has a good education or trade, so much the better. But some of the best brothers have little or no education. If a man has a generous heart, a cheerful disposition and willing hands, he may become a brother, provided he feels the call to a higher life and desires to prove his love for God by service and sacrifice. It is not what one does for the Lord that counts, but the good will that one has in doing it.

A brother who attends to the door of a religious house, or who acts as sacristan of the church, may be more pleasing to God than a great preacher who wins the praise of the congregation by a grand discourse. It all depends. If you work for the Lord and not for yourself, the smallest thing becomes big. And if you work for yourself and not for the Lord, the biggest thing may count for nothing.

In the Great War of 1914-1918, some of our soldiers served in the kitchen, others were engaged in digging, some did domestic duty in the barracks. Many of these men were refined and wealthy. Did they consider that they were lowering themselves in acting as servants? Not at all. They realized that they were doing it, not for the men whom they served, but for their country, and that motive dignified their labor and made it honorable.

A brother does the domestic work of a religious house for the love of God! How wonderfully that elevates the most common action! What difference does it make whether you use a broom or a pen if you are doing it for God, to advance His cause? The priest would have no time for study,

preaching, hearing confessions, et cetera, if he had to attend to his own table and room. The brother who does that for him actually shares in all the good work done by the priest in the pulpit and in the confessional.

Besides, the brother is offering to God the sacrifice of his life, and by this sacrifice, he is helping the Church to continue the work of Jesus Christ among mankind. That constitutes him a fellow worker of our Lord. It makes him an officer in the company captained by Jesus Christ.

For the brother is not working for this man or that, but for Jesus Christ. When a soldier obeys an officer, he is not obeying the man, but the government whom the officer represents. And so with the brother. He consecrates himself to God. He lives for God, works for God, suffers for God, and, if need be, dies for God. And God will be his reward. The brother who has dedicated his life to the service of God on earth will reign with God forever in heaven.

The life of a brother is humble, it is hidden from the eyes of man, it has no reward here, except peace and the satisfaction of a life nobly spent. But God will not be outdone in generosity. We can never regret anything we have done for God. And if the eyes of the world do not see the brother, God sees even the littlest things he does for Him, and He who sees in secret will reward openly. After all, is it not enough to have God see us and be pleased with us?

I speak to the man who reads this. Are you free to volunteer for the brotherhood, and do you feel called to the higher life of service and sacrifice? If so, talk the matter over with your pastor or confessor — a priest who knows you well. The Church needs you. The call for brothers is loud and insistent. The religious orders can double their work if they have good brothers.

But do not consider this vocation unless you are prepared to make big sacrifices. You will have to give up life-long associations, change your manner of living entirely. However, you will do that and other things gladly if you have a real vocation. The sign of it is the desire to lead a higher life and to be of service to your fellow men for the love of God and the salvation of souls. If you feel that vocation, pray, consult your confessor, and go ahead in God's name. What a joy it will be to you for all eternity to realize that you enrolled yourself as a helper under the standard of Jesus Christ!

But do not act inconsiderately. A true vocation does not require haste. The fervor of the moment should not decide a step of such importance. If, however, you experience a steady attraction to the higher and holier service of God, do not harden your heart to it. Cultivate the seeds of vocation, and when you feel convinced that God wants you, be generous enough to respond. And when you have made up your mind, let nothing interfere with God's call. Be prepared for obstacles and difficulties. These will only serve to show your loyalty to your captain, Jesus Christ.

The day will come for us all when we shall have to say farewell to the world and its allurements. What a comfort it will be for the brother in that hour to know that for love of God he renounced the world of his own accord, and gave himself in life and in death to his commander, Christ. That death will be a great victory for all eternity.

"He that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with me in my throne..." (Apocalypse 3:21). What a glorious aim in life is that! Such a destiny makes life worth living, no matter what our trials and hardships may be. The life of a brother may be humble and hidden from the eyes of the world, but it leads to a "never fading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4). Every good Christian may attain to that crown. But the good brother does so more securely, more peacefully and more gloriously.

"If you will be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come follow me" (Matthew 19:21). That is the invitation, which the Son of God Himself gives to generous souls. It is a call to serve Christ with personal devotion, to give up everything for His sake. "Blessed are they that dwell in Your house, O Lord:..." (Psalm 84:4 or Psalm 83:5 in the Vulgate). "Blessed are Your men, and blessed are Your servants, who stand before You always..." (See 1 Kings 10:8.) (In the Vulgate, it is 3 Kings.) "For better is one day in Your courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners" (Psalm 84:10 or Psalm 83:11 in the Vulgate).

The good brother may be a servant in the House of the Lord in this life, but the servants of God "shall reign forever and ever" (Apocalypse 22:5) in the life to come.

"What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Those who follow Christ as religious are taking the surest means to save their souls, for they are His companions to whom He said: "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). And their place shall be near the very throne of God. On earth, they were close to Christ by their consecrated lives; in heaven, they shall be close to Him in glory. On earth, they left all to follow Him. In heaven, all He has will be theirs. It is service and sacrifice here; hereafter it will be joy with the Eternal King forever. Such is the career of the man who leaves all to follow Christ. The world has for its votaries nothing comparable to this glorious destiny. "Better is one day in Your courts above thousands" (Psalm 84:10 or Psalm 83:11 in the Vulgate).

Talk 15. YOUNG WOMEN AND THE HIGHER LIFE.

God uses all His creatures in His designs. To womankind He has paid the greatest honors. He asked for the cooperation of a woman when He sent His only Son into the world. And Christ while engaged on earth in doing His Father's business, accepted the help and ministrations of women, and set them as examples of piety and charity. At the great sacrifice on Calvary, there stood at the foot of the cross the sinless Mary and the penitent Magdalen.

The mission of Christ was only begun while He was among men. By the Church He continues that mission and will continue it to the end. His Church turns to women for their help even as He Himself did. Good Catholic mothers are real helpers of Christ. The woman who gives a good example as mother and wife in the home is doing God's work. The family is her mission field. If she does her work there as a good Catholic mother, she will receive an eternal recompense. Millions of women have become saints just by being good Catholic wives and mothers. Women, you have a noble work right at home.

But there are some women who experience an inclination to a life higher than the ordinary. They feel a strong impulse to devote themselves to lofty ideals. They desire to lead a life of sublime virtue and to spend themselves for the welfare of others. They are not satisfied with doing merely what they must, but aim at doing all they can.

They reflect that Jesus Christ so loved them as to give His life for them. And they hear His appealing words: "Behold My heart which has loved you so much; child, give Me your heart." Knowing that Jesus wants their services, but that He does not command the higher life, but only invites them to it, they desire to satisfy that divine Heart.

Many women spending their lives in the round of worldly duties strive to lead this higher interior life. By frequent Holy Communion and by deeds of zeal and charity, they satisfy somewhat their

lofty spiritual aspirations. Some are so circumstanced that they cannot aspire to anything more. They have the spirit and desire to advance higher, but their duties of life do not permit it. In God's sight, these pious souls have all the merit of supreme sacrifice, for God sees the heart and the intention and rewards accordingly. There are many cloistered souls in the world.

There are other women, many in fact, so situated in life that, if they receive the call to a life consecrated entirely to the service of God and their own sanctification, they are able to follow it. These favored souls become the beloved spouses of Christ. They leave home and friends and the comforts of life to belong entirely to Jesus.

Are you one of these? Are you so situated that you can give yourself unreservedly to the service of God as a sister in a religious order?

The Church of God today has need of the sisterhoods more than ever. Every bishop in the country is appealing for sisters for his diocese. No one can do certain work in a parish like the sisters. There may be devoted women who teach and care for the little ones and the helpless, but only the sisters can give all of their time and their first interests to it, in the way that helps most the service of God and the salvation of souls.

Every parish that has a convent feels itself blessed. The sisters are truly the Red Cross Society of God's army. They help priests and people in a way that only their sublime ministrations can do. Besides, they are sanctifying themselves while helping and sanctifying others. They are working for Jesus Christ and with Him.

Like the holy women who accompanied our Lord in His missions throughout the Holy Land, ministering to His wants, the sisters help Christ by ministering to Him in His Church. The Church is Jesus Christ in the world, carrying out by human instrumentality the work He inaugurated while on earth. That is why He says of it: "He who hears you, hears me." That is why the sisters, in giving their ministrations and their lives to the service of the Church, are consecrating themselves to the person and service of Jesus Christ. What a noble career for the young woman who feels the call to the religious life and is in a position to respond!

God in the mystery of His plans sees fit to depend on men and women for the carrying on of His work. He could do everything directly if He wished, or He could employ angels as His ministers. No. Instead, it pleases Him to choose weak men and women as His aides. He employs the ministry of priests, brothers and sisters to accomplish His good purposes among mankind.

Perhaps His reason for so doing is to honor us mortals. What a glory it is to be associated with God Almighty in His work! We may envy the Angel Gabriel, who was employed by God to carry the message of the Incarnation to Mary. But do we realize that God employs priests and religious men and women to carry the fruits of the Incarnation into the souls and lives of men!

Every time a sister, by her prayers, penances, good works or sufferings, helps a soul to draw nearer to Christ, she is doing in a certain degree what our Blessed Mother did who gave Christ to us by the Incarnation. Mary gave us Jesus. The good sister, by her consecrated life, brings Jesus into the souls of men. She brings Jesus to those who, except for her devoted zeal, might never have known Him.

Of course, we can all do that by being zealous Catholics, but the sister does it as a profession. It is her life. She is bringing Jesus into the lives of little children in the classroom. She brings Jesus into the lives of worldly men by her silent and holy presence as she walks through the streets or attends devoutly the services of the Church. She brings Jesus into the hearts of sinners whom her gentle

ministrations affect in hospitals, in homes, and even in prisons. She is saving souls not only when she is teaching catechism, saying her beads or reciting the office, but all day long, by every act she performs, since she does all for Christ. Her every act is thus the very best of prayers.

Many women feel that life is empty, that there is little in it worthwhile, that it is one round of vanity or disappointment. Sisters in religion never feel that way. For them every day is full, full of the things that count most, the things which count for time and eternity. They spend themselves in efforts for the spiritual and bodily welfare of others. Their deeds are truly worthwhile, benefitting as they do their fellow beings.

Besides being worthwhile here, these deeds also reach out in their effect to the hereafter. The actions, which fill up the life of the sisters, go with them beyond the grave and stand with them before the tribunal of God. The good sister realizes that all she does is done for her Spouse, Jesus Christ. What a joy it will be to her in that final hour, "which most people dread", to know that she is going into His presence, whom she has loved and lived for. Her hands will be full of the very things God values most, things which cost service and sacrifice.

It is the abiding thought that all they do is for Jesus, that gives the sisters their wonderful serenity, which all admire and envy. They know that they are pleasing God and have His favor. What does all the rest matter! They know that He takes as done unto Himself all that they do for others in His name and for His love. That is why they are so content with what people ordinarily consider a hard life. Sometimes you will hear persons say that they do not understand how so many of our refined and delicate young ladies can stand the arduous life of a sister. No one finds that hard which is done out of love. Love much, and no labor will seem too great or too mean.

There is no love like that which Jesus Christ inspires in the hearts of His followers. Once it is enkindled in the soul, heaven begins. The sisters have that strong love of Christ, which has made heroic characters. All through the ages, Jesus has attracted to His service the noblest of souls.

Do not fancy that the call to the sisterhoods is only for the very exceptional girl. True greatness in God's estimation is a pure heart and a generous will. All can cultivate these qualities. The desire, the strong desire, to be dear to God and worthy of a vocation, is the first step toward becoming worthy.

A holy life must precede a vocation to the sisterhood. A young woman must show God, by doing her best where she is, that she aspires to ascend higher. Let her do her part, and He will do His. He is more desirous of advancing His children than they are of being advanced. Prayer and Holy Communion are the best arguments with God for one who desires Him to accept her among His chosen ones as a sister.

If you only knew how much the Church needs devoted lives now, you would pray hard for yourself, for your friends, that God might grant vocations to the sisterhood. Every order of sisters is short-handed. There is so much for them to do, and there are so few to do it. In many orders, one sister is doing the work of three. Many are breaking down from overwork. They offer joyously even this sacrifice of health for their Beloved, Jesus Christ, but surely, we have young women who will go to their aid, not only to help them, but to help the countless souls whom they serve.

It is a call to the colors. The standard of Christ summons our young women to fight under it. That standard is carried by Jesus Christ, who first sacrificed Himself for us before asking us to sacrifice ourselves for Him. He invites our young women to take up His cross and follow after Him.

The life of the sisters is a way of the cross. It is also a royal road to heaven. The girl who becomes a sister, has much to suffer; she carries the cross of Christ. There are privations and fatigue and misunderstandings and disappointments in convent life as in the world. But Jesus experienced all these before us. There are sufferings, no doubt, but, oh, what consolation! We have to suffer anyway, no matter what our career in life. What a joy to realize that we are suffering for One we love and One who loves us!

Only the young woman with a generous soul can think of being a sister. Selfish persons cannot follow close to the generous Christ. And the sisters follow Him very close. But if a girl has a strong desire to belong to our Lord, and a will to serve Him in all things, He will strengthen her as He has strengthened so many others.

The sisterhoods need recruits. They are appealing for help. But desirous as they are for new members, they want only the right kind. In the Great War of 1914-1918, our country needed helpers of all kinds, but eager as was the government for recruits for the various departments, it was nevertheless exacting in its requirements. The sisterhoods, too, have a high standard.

What requirements, what qualifications, must a woman possess in order to be a sister? That all depends on the order in question. There is one basic requirement for all the sisterhoods — virtue. That does not mean that the novice must be faultless. But it does mean a true desire to be good and a firm determination not to yield to temptation.

Those who are most sorely tempted sometimes turn out to be the holiest and the most serviceable to others. Those who rise promptly after a fall, and endeavor not to fall again, are practicing virtue. A sublime character is frequently developed by self-conquest, and those who have hard struggles with themselves know how to be helpful to others. The virtue, therefore, which is required for a sister's career is a strong will to keep God's law, shown by the avoidance of whatever tends to sin.

Moreover, as the sisters form one large family in the convent, it is necessary that a congenial, or at least not a disagreeable, disposition should be associated with virtue. Sisters are brought into contact with people of all sorts. Their disposition should be such as to win rather than repel those among whom they work.

Some orders, which are devoted entirely to higher education, require a good general education in those who desire to join them. Other orders, engaged in primary or secondary teaching, demand of prospective members just an ordinary grammar school or high school education. But the majority of the orders have a place for all women of good will, regardless of education. Some sisters care for infants, cripples, the aged, the wayward and the orphan. Sisters have a part in everything that ministers to the welfare of others. No woman of normal qualifications need feel that the sisterhoods are closed to her if she is willing to do what she is best fitted for. For further details about the sisterhoods read *Convent Life* a book written for those who want definite information about nuns and vocations.

(The Book to which I refer is: *Convent Life — the meaning of a Religious Vocation*. By Martin J. Scott, S. J.)

If after consideration, you feel that you have a call to a higher life as a sister, consult your pastor or confessor. Or, better still, go to one of the convents known to you and have a talk with one of the sisters. Do not be afraid that they will capture you unawares. Desirous as they are of adding to their

order, they cannot accept those unsuited to their work and rule. It is harder to get into the convent than to get out of it.

The step is too important for precipitate action, taken without every consideration. Where there persists a strong and constant desire to leave all and follow Christ, nothing should keep the maiden back. She must expect difficulties and discouragements, but a true vocation becomes stronger by such obstacles.

No one ever accomplishes anything worthwhile without opposition. The only way to escape criticism and opposition is to sit down and attempt nothing. That brings you nowhere. If a vocation is worth anything, it is worth a struggle. And what a glorious thing it is to be associated with Jesus Christ in carrying on His work! What an honor to be a partner of God in saving souls and bringing peace and cheer and holiness into the lives of men!

Oh, it is hard, yes. The life demands a great deal from weak human nature. But look to what it leads! It is a path that leads straight to God. Moreover, even in this life, it gives a peace, which surpasses understanding. The knowledge that she is the beloved companion and spouse of Jesus Christ transforms her, and makes her feel that she is blessed indeed to be able to work and suffer for Him.

And He will give Himself as the reward exceedingly great. We cannot surpass Him in generosity. We can never regret anything we have done for Him. If He gives eternal life to those who keep His commandments, what will He give to the good sister who has sacrificed herself and all she possessed to His holy service!

We must all part with the world and its allurements some day. What a joy that last hour, so dreaded by many, will bring to the sister who has left all, of her own accord, at the call of her Beloved. Death for such a one will only be the removal of the barrier which separates Lover and beloved.

All of us may attain to that blessed union with God, but the good sister's path is serene and secure and glorious. Hers will be the very perfection of espousals, for on earth she listened to Christ's voice saying: "If you will be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me!" In life, she followed Him. Beyond, He will be hers for all eternity!
