

The Letter to Anne de Guigné's Friends

Self-effacement

Several months before her death, Sister Elisabeth de la Trinité, a Carmelite in Dijon, who died at the age of 26 in 1906 and was beatified by Saint John-Paul II, wrote to Françoise de Sourdon, who was then 19 years old :

“It seems to me that the soul which is the most free is the one which forgets itself entirely. If I were asked the secret of happiness, I would say that it is not to think about oneself and deny oneself continually [...]

To attain the ideal life of the soul, I believe that one must live in the supernatural, that is to say, never to act *naturally*... We must realize that God is within us and do everything with him. We are, thus, never trivial, even when performing the most mundane activities, for we do not live in these actions, we are above them! A supernatural soul never deals with matters of secondary importance but only with God. Oh! How simple life becomes when it approaches that of blessed spirits, how detached from ourselves and everything else our life becomes! Everything is reduced to the *one thing which is necessary* as the Lord said to Martha. Then are we truly great, truly free for we have *put our will into that of God*”.

As we read these profound lines, we cannot help noticing that they apply admirably to Anne. To illustrate this, let us look at some testimonies and anecdotes from Anne's life.

“The more I reflect on so many virtues, the more I see that they were the result of a total renunciation. At the end of her life, she was really dead to herself. It was a total *self-effacement*, she no longer existed in her own eyes. She certainly possessed all God's gifts, and was advancing towards perfection with an incomparable assurance, without faltering, without hesitation, because she was not even thinking of herself. No, she would never ask herself if something would please her or hurt her, but simply, if it was necessary, imposed by duty, wished by God or if it would please others.” (Testimony of Mother Saint-Raymond, her catechist)

The story of the pancakes is well-known. This example often touches children: “Nénette seemed to forget her turn, long since past. She was only thinking of

looking after the little ones and seeing that they had all they needed. [...] The maid, Jeanne had to say: *Now, this pancake is for you Mademoiselle Nénette; I will look after the little ones.*" (Hélène de Cornulier, Anne's cousin)

"Do good, please others, this was how Anne lived, always going towards a supernatural goal... a rare thing, especially at her age." (Mademoiselle Basset)

"Her self-effacement was remarkable, she only lived for others no matter what the cost was for herself." (Madame de Guigné)

"When on a boat, on the Annecy lake, the children's greatest pleasure was to learn to row. Each child in turn, tried to manipulate the oar. Nénette seemed very happy to do this; but passed the oar almost immediately, without saying a word, to one of the others." (Hélène de Cornulier)

A nun, who was supervising the catechism children's recreation, said: "I can see her now, when we were playing games after catechism, for she struck me already then by her self-effacement to the point of not searching for her own pleasure, which would have been normal at the age of nine, but of looking after her little sisters, running at their speed at the risk of being caught, etc."

"One is particularly struck by this great sign of the love of God and our neighbour which is *self-effacement*. From the first days of her illness, she worried more about the fatigue of her family than about her own condition and she said to Our Lord: *Heal the other sick people.*"¹

Let us ask Anne to teach us self-effacement. At any age, we can enter and progress along this path to saintliness.

A benedictin monk

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¹ Father Garrigou-Lagrange – *L'héroïcité de la vertu chez les enfants : Anne de Guigné. La Vie Spirituelle*, Janvier 1935.