

## **Twelfth Meditation: On the way in which we must reprove and correct the faults of those whom we are guiding**

### **First Point**

It would be of little value to make reproofs and corrections, if those who make them do not take the right steps to make them well. The first thing to which we must pay attention is not to undertake reproofs and corrections except under the guidance of the Spirit of God. This is why, before undertaking them, it is proper to become interiorly recollected, to give ourselves up to God's Spirit, and to be disposed to make the reproof or undertake the correction with the greatest possible wisdom and in a manner best suited to make them useful to the one to whom we intend to make it.

For people, and even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons.

We must reprove and correct with justice, by helping the children to recognize the wrong they have done, and what correction the fault they have committed deserves, and we must try to have them accept it.

Also, since they are Christians, we must be disposed to make the reproof or correction in such a way that God may be pleased with it, and that the children accept it as a remedy for their fault, and as a means of becoming more wise. For this is the result which the Holy Spirit says correction must produce in children.

It is proper also to consider before God what sort of correction the fault deserves, whether the one at fault is truly determined to receive it with submission, or whether it is necessary to try to dispose him to be submissive.

There is no need to fear that corrections will have a bad result if we have acted prudently in making them. On the contrary, teachers who reprove and correct those who commit faults draw upon themselves the praise of people, the blessing of God, and the gratitude of those who have been corrected. For you will have done them more good in that way than if you had flattered them with

beautiful words, which only serve to deceive them and maintain them in their faults and disorderly conduct.

Have you up to the present paid attention to yourself so that you correct your disciples only with God in view? Have you not corrected them with exaggerated zeal, and perhaps with impatience and anger? Was that to help them change their conduct, or was it not rather to punish them for some annoyance they caused you? Has charity guided you in this behavior, or have you not acted rather to vent your bad humor on them?

Pay close attention to this in the future, so that you will conduct yourself in this important matter only with the desire to please God.

## **Second Point**

Although Saint Paul warned his disciple Titus to admonish with vigor those who live without obedience, lest they corrupt their faith, and also he told Timothy to do the same thing to cause fear in others, he wrote to him at the same time that he ought to be patient and moderate in correcting those who offer resistance, because perhaps God will give them the spirit of repentance. In fact this is one of the best ways to win and touch the hearts of those who have fallen into fault and to dispose them to be converted.

This is the way the prophet Nathan went about it, when he was sent by God to King David, in order to get David to enter into himself and become aware of the two sins, adultery and murder, which he had committed. The prophet began by telling him a parable about a rich man who had a great number of sheep, and stole the only sheep owned by a poor man. This simple story of terrible injustice told by Nathan aroused the anger of David against the guilty man and made him say that he was deserving of death and that he would not grant him any pardon. At this Nathan answered him, You are that very man! and immediately applied his story to the two crimes that David had committed, representing to him in God's name the graces that God had given him, and how he had abused them.

This is the sort of method you must use with those you instruct when they fall

into some fault and you have to correct them. If it happens that you have been aroused by some passion, avoid making any correction while you experience this emotion, because then the correction would be very harmful to your disciples as well as yourself. In those situations enter into yourself and allow the time of anger to pass without showing it exteriorly. Then, when you feel that you are completely free of passion, you will be able to abandon yourself to God's Spirit and make the correction you planned with all the moderation of which you are capable.

Have you acted this way in the past? Pray God never to allow you to be carried away by any outburst of anger when you have to punish any of your disciples.

### **Third Point**

The result which the wise reproof of Nathan produced in David ought to make you realize how much good the corrections you give your disciples will profit them, when they are given with gentleness and charity. David became angry at the man Nathan described in his parable, and when he realized that he was the one for whom the parable was told, he had no other response but the words, I have sinned; at once he took upon himself a severe penance. When the child born of his adultery died, David adored God and made it clear that he accepted his holy will. That is how the wise and restrained manner of the prophet toward the sinful David softened the king's heart: he acknowledged his two sins, asked God's pardon for them, and was truly sorry.

The result of a wise correction is that those receiving it are disposed to correct their faults, whereas when correction is administered through passion and without God in view, it serves only to turn the disciple against his teacher and to arouse in him feelings of revenge and ill will, which sometimes last a long time, because results are generally related and similar to the cause that produces them.

If, then, you want your corrections to have the results they ought to have, administer them in a way that can please God and those who receive them. Take care, above all, that it be charity and zeal for the salvation of the souls of your pupils that lead you to correct them. Show them so much kindness when you

give corrections that, though you may cause them pain, they not only will not be angry at you but will show you gratitude for the good you have done for them, a great regret for their faults, and a firm intention not to commit them again. From this very moment put yourself in the disposition to use the means needed to carry out this resolution.