

**Letter 101 From Quebec. To her niece: Mother Mary, Ursuline, Tours. Oct. 1646.**

*She gives advice about the spiritual life and how to behave during the election of a Superior.*

**Day 1**

My dear and well-beloved daughter,

May the peace and love of Jesus be yours in time and eternity.

Blessed be that most loveable Love of our hearts who wishes to purify your soul with so much mercy.

Do you think I am telling the truth, my dear daughter? Yes, certainly.

**The sufferings** you have endured are the signs that He wants you. It seems to me that I have already spoken to you as if you had already entered that state.

I tell you once again that the souls for whom God intends to do great things are led by this path.

First, He had called you by **a great interior attraction**.

Then, He has given you strong inclinations and ardent desires to **imitate His Son** perfectly, giving you the experience of whom this same Son has said, no one comes to me unless the Father draws him.

He has drawn you into solitude where He wishes to speak to your heart by the movements He has given you in your infancy.



## Day 2

Nevertheless whatever virtue one may have, one commits many **imperfections**, like **presumption**, **love of one's own excellence** and **spiritual gluttony** and **avarice**. We swallow those faults like water without noticing it because interior intoxication **obscures** things so much that one sees no harm.

A mixture of the workings of God and the inclinations of nature bubbles up and makes us think that everything is perfect as our imperfect reason judges though we are not culpable not having sought this.

It is nevertheless a great impurity in spiritual things.

These imperfections weaken the soul when it should be making interior acts in the **purity of Faith**, unembarrassed by the senses, if the soul remains in this state it will not get far in the ways of the Spirit; but **God who wishes to see you more perfect than you are, has warned you in the excess of His Goodness to make you go farther.**

You have been too weak to bear such a great deprivation of his sensible grace.

If He **has given you** what He did when in front of the Blessed Sacrament, it was to **strengthen you in the combat**; it was the beginning of the purgation of the sensitive part of the soul.

He doesn't want to discourage you but do not think that because your usual peace has been restored that the storm has passed.

No, expect more if God loves you as I think He does, in His Goodness. **Now you will know if you are making progress if the purgation takes gradual effect**; if you are faithful, patient, gentle and peaceful; if you are very obedient to the operations of Him who is purifying you; if you are exact in the observance of your rules; especially if you are very humble in times of suffering and depression.

### Day 3

I add further if you avoid **particular friendships and intrigues** such as cloistered persons, especially women are subject.

Finally if you avoid **self-pity** and **do not resent suffering**.

In these times the devil does not sleep; when the soul is powerless to act he tries by a thousand blandishments to flatter nature and to represent things as good and just and permitted in order to appear to pass as stylish and witty.

Weak souls often lose out here, often lose the way grace traced for them.

At this point many turn back or make no progress in the spiritual life after years of conversion and so lose the great and advantageous share that God wanted to give of His grace and His love.

**If then you are courageous in times of purgation such as you have told me about, you will do what God wants of you**, for His sole design is to make you capable of receiving His favours and the Holy inspirations that lead the soul rapidly to the perfection which cowardly souls never reach. **So much for times of affliction.**



## Day 4

### Now for times of consolation.

What you have to do is, **never to depend a moment on your own strength**; on the contrary continually distrust yourself.

### The devil works powerfully when one feels most assured.

He gains some advantage over the soul, if only a sigh or a glance that favoured him, i.e. favoured self-love or for a human motive.

A soul that loves Jesus must always have **one eye fixed on Him and the other on herself and her own lowliness**. That is to say that our union with God if it is real, far from making us close our eyes to our own unworthiness opens them according as we approach this incomprehensible purity, it helps us see clearly our weakness and infirmity and this is how we become abject and humble in our own eyes.

All I have said concerns your present dispositions but don't think that everything is done.

If God loves you, you will go through **changing spiritual states** in which you will think all is lost, but no matter what your state remember that God's intention is to sanctify you.

I have no doubt that Fr. Salim and your Superior have given you the necessary advice to strengthen you, for the instructions given at the beginning must be very gentle for two reasons: first to **instruct us and form us in the spiritual life** and the second to **strengthen us** by good principles and holy maxims based on the life and example of Jesus Christ, our adorable Master and divine Exemplary Cause.

And when these maxims correspond to our condition they should be invariable but constant and firm until the last breath, there being **no moment of our life when we can exempt ourselves from obeying God and imitating Him**.

## Day 5

If then you are established on these principles and I presume you are, thanks to your good Jesuit Directors and Rev. Mother Francis of St. Bernard as I have seen by your letters and your writings, keep to these maxims, make them the object of your **particular examen to discover the imperfections you have committed in them and to see if you are making progress.**

Take special care of **one thing** that is of great importance for advancing in the spiritual life.

We must not undertake all at once the practice of all the virtues and all the maxims we envisage. That would be a useless undertaking contrary to human weakness. You would have the theory but not the practice.

It is not that we won't meet occasions that require all our strength and all our virtues and maxims, but that is unusual. Choose **the most serious or most frequent imperfection and then follow the contrary maxim.** Spend a month at one or a week at another according to necessity.

**When you have practised one, go to another without resisting or making concessions** to corrupt nature that will not cease to complain, but do not listen to its cries or complaints unless your directors see indiscretion or excess.

When you have done all you will have arrived at the degree of perfection God wants and your state as religious obliges you to aim.



## Day 6

Your director has set a good road, don't look for another.

Profit by what you have learned and follow the instructions of her whom God has given you as Superior as the rule ordains.

I found it good always to regard my Superiors as holding **the place of God**, **but** there is a certain **secret pride** that insinuates into women especially if they are not careful, which causes them to reject the order God has established for their direction.

They imagine the direction they get from their Superiors is not enough, that they must look for another and this secret vice causes them gradually to despise those who represent God's order to them and who would lead them very soon into the spirit of the order and to the rules that they neglect by straying away. This is a misfortune that we cannot sufficiently deplore.

This does not prevent us from time to time and in certain necessities mentioned in the rule, **to ask for advice and enlightenment** from the extraordinary Confessor and from another person of merit provided however that fidelity to your Superior and your director comes first.

## Day 7

As for the special graces of which you spoke, lean on the essential and solid and see they are **given only for your sanctification and for the practise of the virtues** which you must never regard as far away from you, because that would be only to amuse yourself.

You must **practise the virtues that the moment requires**.

For example, if it is a question of your call to Canada: do in France what you would do here. If in class do for the French girls **what you would do** for the Indian girls in Canada, offering your actions to God for this intention. Do the same with the other virtues and in this way you will profit by everything and the virtues you have only in theory will be reduced to acts.

You will see in all this that **anxious desires trouble the soul**. You must guard against this as much as possible to keep **peace in the heart that is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit**.

Don't worry about your Canadian vocation, **if it comes from God it will come to pass when the time comes**, for His Glory, your good and our consolation. In the meantime, I am with you every day in spirit and I try to do for you what the Divine Master asks and what you desire.



## Day 8

The two imperfections that you tell me about and which you say is **your special weakness will never be perfectly corrected except, as you become spiritual.**

Both come from your **natural disposition** and you will have more trouble and more virtue in trying to mortify them.

They are telling you the truth in saying you are like me in that, for in my youth I was the most self-satisfied in the world and I had and still have this natural vivacity in my actions.

All that turns to good if the actions are done with presence of mind, i.e. if you are pleased with yourself, **share your joy with Jesus in loving conversation according to the grace you are given.**

And as for human respect never be complacent except for the sake of charity.

For when it is a question of amusements or imperfections you must have nothing to do with it. On such occasions you **must overcome human respect.**

**You won't be so well loved by some but you will be more cherished by God and esteemed by those wiser and holier. You must not seek esteem; it follows naturally from grace and virtue.** You tell me that the love for such esteem is a temptation. Alas my dear child, a good self examination will convince you soon enough, that **one's self-esteem and one's desire to be esteemed by others is silly**, the miseries that all experience in themselves are convincing proof.

I didn't get the letter that you and Mother Clare spoke of. I should certainly have answered it. I have got so many proofs of the virtue of that dear sister that in my opinion you should continue **Faith sharing with her because she helps lead to virtue and she tends towards God. Friendship that leads to this is always good. Friendships that do not lead to God are not good and must be avoided.**

You asked me to answer some questions. I am doing it with sincerity and the lights I have.

I don't know how you will take my answer but I must say that I cannot betray or flatter anybody. When it's a question of virtue, sincerity is my only guide. Try then to run as best you can in the race for virtue, the crown is given only to those who conquer.



## Day 9

I have a word of advice to give **about the elections**, which I know are coming. You have a vote and it's a matter in which you have no experience. **I am happy to tell you how to behave so as to avoid scruples later, if we don't take Our Lord as our guide.** This is what you are to do my dear child.

Prepare for three months beforehand, and during that time **empty your heart** of all desires and natural inclinations for anybody. Do not take anybody's opinion, have no private meeting with anybody to speak of the elections and don't tell your sentiments or thoughts about the matter to anyone. **Every day present to Our Lord the person He intends to take His place in the Community to lead His spouses.**

Ask Him that the Holy Spirit would give you the light to **recognise** her and that you would make the right choice. Don't come to a conclusion until the morning of the election at Mass of the Holy Spirit. If you behave like this you will surely elect the one God wants.

You see dear child, from all I have said that I want you to practise real solid virtue. If you work at it the blessings of Heaven will come in abundance into your soul. It's a question of becoming holy and we must walk briskly in the path of sanctity. **Don't excuse yourself for youth**, for if you are young in years, you must be old in sense.

**Be patient when drawn from solitude by obedience or necessity.**

If you were in Canada you would perhaps have less time for Retreat. Like St. Catherine of Sienna make an interior solitude in your soul that you can keep everywhere and try to live there the life of God. Normally we live there with greater purity and perfection than in physical solitude because **His Goodness blesses the obedient soul and adds the grace of union to that obedience.**

From Quebec. Oct. 1646.

Kelly, Sr. M. St. Dominic, O.S.U. *Marie of the Incarnation 1599 - 1672 Correspondence*, (translated from the French edition by Dom Guy Oury Monk of Solesmes), Irish Ursuline Union, 2000, p. 115-118.