

X. Vigilance

Vigilance is the virtue which makes us diligent and painstaking in fulfilling all our duties.

A teacher needs this virtue both for himself and for his pupils.

He must watch over himself, i.e., over the thoughts of his mind, over the movements of his heart, over the use he makes of his senses, and over his entire person so as not to do anything save what is good, and to fulfill his obligations worthily. The faults he might commit, through lack of vigilance, in any one of all these different manners, would obviously jeopardize the education of the children, and might even inspire them with lack of esteem and liking for him.

A teacher should be vigilant over his pupils: he is their guardian angel. If his absence or his inattention (they amount to the same thing) gave the devil who constantly goes about, an opportunity to rob them of the precious treasure of their innocence, what would he be able to reply to Jesus Christ who will ask him for an account of their souls, and will reproach him with having been less vigilant to protect them than Satan was to ruin them?

From all this it follows:

1) A good teacher will not leave his class under the pretext that his colleague in the next room will maintain good order in both classes. If he is obliged to absent himself it should be only for a very serious necessity and always for as short a time as possible. In fact, his presence contributes much to making the students more attentive, by fixing and arresting their imagination; it also spares them many distractions and negligences which give rise to many faults; these lead to reprimands and punishments which the teacher might have prevented, if he had not been absent.

2) When he is in class, the teacher observes everything; he misses nothing; he sees all that goes on. In this way he maintains the students in order and application. Vigilance makes them come to school on time, and to do all the work given them; it ensures that they keep everything they use, their books, copybooks and papers in good order. It can be said, in short, that the teacher's vigilance must extend to everything; it directs, maintains, and inspires everything: prayer, reading, recitations, catechism, the manner of following Mass, writing, arithmetic, spelling - in short, there is nothing which it does not affect.

3) A good teacher watches over the behavior of the pupils, generally everywhere that he finds himself among them; acting with prudence however in order that he can prevent their noticing that they are being studied. Besides, he must continually apply himself in order to discover, to know everything that goes on not only in the class, but also in the streets either before or after school; and, if he cannot himself see everywhere, he makes skillful use of inspectors whom he chooses from among them: he even makes still better use of his companions, with whom he maintains a praiseworthy agreement inspired by charity, for the good administration of the school, following in this, the advice which the Apostle gave to the Romans, saying: "*It can only be to God's glory then for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you.*" (Romans 15:7).

4) It is especially in church that the teacher's application, care, and attention

should be concentrated on the students to maintain them in order, modesty, and the respect due to the sanctity of the place. For this purpose, he carefully avoids looking around or fixing his gaze on other objects; he restrains his curiosity and absolutely forbids himself whatever might distract him from watching over the children; he should not even stop to pay attention to the progress of the ceremonies of divine worship, if this could weaken the attention he should pay to his pupils; for he should be convinced that, if he happened to forget himself on these points, the boys would quickly notice it, and would not fail to misbehave (not being seen by him), to be scandalized, to imitate the bad example of others, and to hope to escape with impunity.

5) Finally, the vigilance of a teacher extends even to the future. Past experience suggests to him the precautions that can be taken against what may happen and which reason may foresee. His attention, then, will lead him to get rid of whatever might harm his students, and also to prevent their faults as well as the sanctions which would follow from them; he should not allow them to have, if possible, either the means or the occasions for committing sin. It is much better, in fact, to prevent evil rather than to punish it once committed. This is what the constant presence and the attentive eye of the teacher bring about; for as a rule the students, before doing something wrong, begin by looking around to see whether they may not be surprised and noticed by the teacher. They often fear his looks more than his corrections.

Still, the teacher's vigilance should not be restless, suspicious, worried, accompanied by ill-founded conjectures. Such action could be against charity and justice. It would also be mortifying for the students who might notice it, as well as uncomfortable and bothersome for the teacher himself. His application should be peaceable, without agitation, trouble, constraint, or affectation; it will then be all the more effective. Just as nothing should be omitted which is required by careful supervision, so too one should not go to extreme lengths in one's precautions. For, while striving to protect the children's morals, one should act in such a way that they do not develop into hypocrites.

The teacher should avoid the following defects as being contrary to vigilance. He should not occupy himself with something other than his duty at any given moment; he should avoid laziness, torpor, useless conversations with the students, with outsiders, even with the other Brothers in school. He should avoid distraction of mind, distaste for school work, inattention, indolence, a kind of paralysis which robs him of the capacity for action, presumption, temerity, laziness, and sluggishness.

Besides these defects a teacher should also avoid too much anxiety, jerky and agitated motions of the body, of the head, the eyes or the arms; negligence in observing everything the students are doing, and whether they carry on their class work with due diligence; failure to apply himself carefully and constantly to whatever can establish order and diligence.

“Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock.” (Acts 20, 28).

“Be thou vigilant, labor in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry.” (2 Tim. 4, 5)

*“A great treasure has been entrusted to our care and vigilance; I mean the children. Let us take all possible care of them and be on guard lest the shrewd enemy, who seeks nothing but souls, should rob us of them to make them his prey.” (St. John Chrysostom, in his *Commentary on the First Letter to Timothy*)*