### Exhortation to the community in Rome

**First Friday of December 1913**

On the first Sunday of Advent, I gave you some hints to keep present during the time of Advent, and I have suggested that it be a time of penance.

Today, I would like to propose to you some ways of penance which we all can practice without damaging our health; precisely the practice of GOOD EXTERIOR BEHAVIOR.

As Father Meschler of happy memory, rightly says in one of his writings, the mortification of the passions is the best rod. If people in the world must seek to acquire good manners, so as not to cause trouble to others, much more the religious who must be examples, as much to the seculars as to their religious brothers and sisters. Of those who are lacking in good manners, they say, in Austria that they are rude. Such an expression applied to lay people is already infamous, much more if directed to Religious. In the world people are called uneducated when they do not behave well, when one lets herself go and gives in to ease or comfort. And it is properly so. They are bad habits which one speaks of. If someone has some of these, she must simply correct herself, and this is a penance which is entirely harmless.

This could be a very appropriate practice Advent: The Church in fact, in this time, records the words of the holy Precursor, John the Baptist: “Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be brought low” (Luke 3,5). The mountains and the hills are precisely the defects which we must eliminate, the valleys are the empty places to be filled with the acquiring of virtue.

Let us propose to ourselves, therefore, for the rest of Advent to dispose of one or other of our bad habits to acquire some good ones. Let us not believe that the habits, not being sins, are something of small account, but rather let us resolve to practice this penance for love of Baby Jesus and with the help of the Madonna.

To good behavior belongs, first of all, good manners at table. I have noticed some bad habits which seem to be in use and I would like to note them here:

Instead of leaning only the wrists, one leans the arm, making herself very comfortable.

One cleans the plate so scrupulously that even the finger touches the bottom.

One licks the spoon.

The fork is not held properly. Whoever does not use the fork, look a little at the Superior, and follow her example.

With similar manners, one does not dare to take her on journeys. In my view people in the Cloister can, behind their closed doors, eat Apishly, but we, who have many contacts with the world, must correct such manners. It also belongs to decorum and to poverty to avoid breaking the bread to the point that the crumbs fall to the ground and are trampled on.

Also the behavior at table seems to leave much to be desired. Some think that the curved position belongs to the practice of humility. However, to keep oneself straight is not contrary to humility, and gives a much kinder impression. Furthermore, it is good for the health, because that way the lungs can better expand. Were we not, perhaps, created by God for an erect gait? Or do we do like the little animals who walk in a curved position? If the professed observe such a posture, the postulants will think that in that consists sanctity and they will imitate it. Let no one believe herself to be too weak to keep erect, because, as you have seen, Mother Ursula, who is not one of the most robust, keeps herself straight. That is due to the fact that our parents have taken great care to have the right position in us children. Others, especially a fellow Sister in Maria Sorg, keep one shoulder higher than the other. If such a habit is not corrected from youth, the lungs form themselves according to the behavior which we keep, in a way that with the years, one becomes crooked, as was the case in one of my uncles.

What then, do we need to do to acquire a good behavior? If you do not know what defects to correct, ask your Superior. If the time didn’t run out, we should once go to table and learn how to eat without food. This is not an invention of mine, but of the Madams of the Sacred Heart who have really practiced with their own novices: to eat a hardboiled egg with decorum… I don’t know if you understand me, but would it be opportune to practice it with the postulants and the novices, so that they know it for later?

Let us apply ourselves, in this holy time of Advent, to dispose of the discourteous ways and practice those that are kind. Let this be our penance. We ask the Madonna to help us, and with these acts of mortification and discipline, we will give joy to Baby Jesus.