Mother Stuart in her own Voice

Select Quotations From Janet Erskine Stuart, rscj

MOTHER STUART QUOTES

From The Life and Letters of Janet Erskine Stuart

It was on the subject of death that my faith, such as it was, received its first shock, when I was 6 years old. Having heard of the resurrection of Lazarus and that miracles equal to that could be worked by faith and prayer, I resolved to raise my mother from the dead and escaped from my nurse into the churchyard to perform the miracle. Having prayed with all my might, I shouted as loud as I could, 'Mama, come forth,' without the slightest doubt I should see the grave open at once. The disappointment was very great and left a seed of doubt in my mind that bore fruit later.

p. 8

From 14-16 is the wonderland of our life, the age of our mysticism, the years of ideals. We are then the discoverers of our own lives. Our world is new every day. Either we are sailing towards new shores, daring mariners in search of the unknown and day by day the horizon dips lower and our stars rise higher, or we are explorers by land, and new wonders reveal themselves on each day's march. Some of us go by sea and others by land all through our lives. We do not love the glories of these years less, now that we can look back and see that some of them were clouds and some were mirages in the desert. They did their work, and they were the band of yellow, clear gold in our lives. We would not be without a day of them. In those years each morning brought its message 'Onward,' each evening asked 'whither?' and the morning answered, 'Onward' again.

p. 14

It is the loneliness of the artistic temperament which finds mysteries everywhere...the 'call of the wild' with all its fascination was very strong, and as she said herself, speaking of these years, 'her spirit strayed like a vagabond among God's creatures.' As a girl, her father allowed her to roam alone miles from home. In these solitary walks she loved to stand listening to silence, believing that words would frame an answer to unspoken questions. She watched the play of light and shade and colour in the woods, and it gave her the sense of the unseen pressing upon her. She heard the undertones of nature, and had strange fears of the unknown and the unseen, but yet was drawn to all that was invisible, longing to find the mystery at the heart of all things. Sights and sounds seemed to her to be full of symbols. She loved unknown and unexpected paths. Byways whose terminus is often nothing at all...where the mysteries call us onward and the shy nightengales sing, and the stress of life is lifted off, and the ticking of time is still...where life seems larger, because of silence and calm, where the soul may be invaded and taken captive, unresisting, by the powers of the world to come.

p. 16

Sing, even if there are tears in your heart.

p. 77

It is an arduous journey, a great undertaking, not a little or an easy thing...sing in every way you can...God gave song, to give heart and courage and joy in life;...if not with the voice, sing with the spirit and the understanding; sing by words of courage and hope, praise and thanksgiving. Call out to one another by high thoughts and spiritual ambitions; these are the songs of our country...

p. 84

Our highest friendships are staked on hazardous guesses and silent understandings. By these, I mean the friendships that are all of admiration and live in the ideal, not the prosy give and take of good offices, still less those that are exacting of affection, but the friendship in which our best self calls out, and the ideal other answers. 'How timely then a comrade's song comes floating on the mountain air,' even though we should not be able to catch the words, we are raised higher by what we have seen, by what we have guessed, and by what, in glowing consciousness, we believe to be there. Soul touches soul, words and other contact are not necessary. Like ships that pass in the night, we have seen the lights and heard the voices. God allows the paths to cross, that sister souls may waken in each other the deeper springs that for the most part lie untouched.

p. 155

Our Lord took the scourge to drive the buyers and sellers form the temple. But he was 'ready for scourging' – not inflicting anything as correction that one is not willing to bear ten times more of oneself, from love.

p. 167

Her very temperament exposed her to a larger share of suffering than falls to many people. The aspirations and cravings of her soul – the sense of distance and aloneness that enclosed her for years – the constant giving with no apparent return, these things would sometimes overwhelm her, and often drove her into herself where none could follow, or out to the work of God, where she might hide from herself' but never did they break down that evenness of temper and that devotedness of service which alone others were allowed to know.

Then again the hunger of her heart after God, the longing to find Him in this world, and in every part of it, and in every individual, especially every priest and religious, at times were crushed by disappointment

till the tears were forced from her very soul; yet those who failed her never knew, and her own hope fed itself and revived in the mystery of God's dealings with the world.

In like manner the ideals she held of what human beings should be, of what the church of God should be, of what she herself should be, as a favoured child of her Father, filled her at times with an overwhelming sense of failure. Once for a long period of her latter days it was an agony bordering on despair. Yet all this was kept God's secret and her own, and the hope never faltered however darkened, and the courage never slackened, and none ever saw the hand tremble that continued to do its work.

p. 174-75

Her love for and her outlook on humanity were Christ-life, and led her, in imitation of her Master, to heights and depths where others could not follow...it was the weakness of her strength. She could not crush the bruised reed nor extinguish the faintest glowing taper, or perhaps she felt: 'there is but one way to brow-beat this world...to go on trusting namely, till faith moves mountains. And sometimes it did. But sometimes it fell out otherwise, and her love, to judge from human standpoint, was bestowed where it was but little merited. Her own sincerity was so great that she could not bring herself to believe in deceit in any on whom she was lavishing true love. She believed also in the possibility of good in every soul.

p. 178

Her strength was in her love.

p. 190

To the end wildflowers had her preference; their characteristics were, she thought truth, delicacy and hardiness. In the wild flowers, she wrote, there is what we call the scent of the wild, an aroma, something almost bitter, not luxurious; like the flavor of alpine strawberries or the scent of heather...wild flowers grow anywhere and everywhere, on hill or rock; they ask very little because they depend on God for everything, just a little water, sun, soil, and very poor soil sometimes it is. They ask for no care of anyone. Day by day, moment by moment, the right thing is given to them. And when asked once for a programme of life, she answered, 'You are all God's property, and our life must be one wild bird's song of praise, one wild flower's face looking up at him. Do not try to be a garden flower.

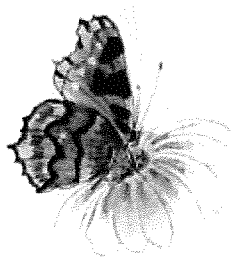
p. 206

Success to be worthy of the name must mean an end proposed and attained...We bring up children for the future, not for the present, not that we may enjoy the fruit of our work, but for others, for God, for the Church, for their parents, for their home life. Therefore, we must have to do with things raw and unfinished, and unpolished. The children will come to us untaught, and leave us half-taught. We sketch the plan, but never seen the crowning of the edifice. So, we must remember that it is better to being a great work than to finish a small one...the work in the rough...may look ugly and yet be full of promise...a piece of finished insignificance is no true success...our education is not meant to turn the children out small and finished, but seriously begun on a wide basis. Therefore, they must leave us with some self-knowledge, some energy, some purpose...If they leave us without these three things, they drift with the stream of life.

p. 214

Our vigilance must be from love. The standard given to us is that of a mother, and her care is proverbial; even God takes it as an illustration of her own. A reason for our vigilance is the respect we owe to the children, the need to give them a habit of living before a witness, of living in public which will make them at once fearless and responsible.

p. 215



Remember that whatever happens...you must say to yourself, according to circumstances, joyfully and thankfully or humbly and submissively or bravely or if need be, defiantly to the troubles within, 'This is part of the story and the story of God's love for you and yours for him.'

p. 292

For God never gives work to do and then takes away the mean of doing it.

p. 314

In her earlier writings we feel that she believes; in the latter years that she has seen.

p. 317

Character is now seen to be of more value than specialization in learning, and the demand is that schools should teach 'how to learn and how to live, rather than how to gain a living.' 'You give values and you give anchorage' was an estimate of the educational work of the Society much appreciated by Mother Stuart.

p. 355

'May peace be your gift to all who come near or depend on you...May God's presence be ever your living joy and the central fact in your life, from which will flow patience, calmness and an unquenchable joy, with that in your soul you can meet anything and each trial will be a small treasure to offer Him the secret of the sanctuary.'

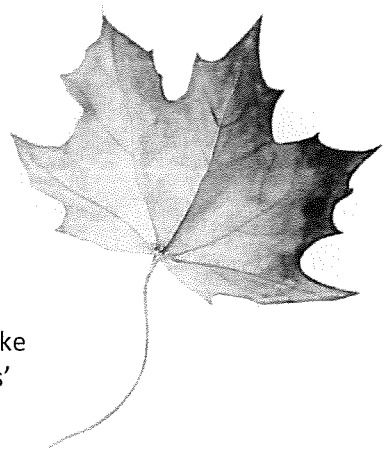
p. 353

The best education, the most solid instruction according to our time and the country where we are, but always essentially based on our principles, that is what our Holy Mother would have desired if she had been called to found a house here...It is not for us to do what our fathers did, but do what our fathers would do if they were here, not as our Holy Mother did in her time, but as she would do here, today, must be our guide.

p. 396

In education of children I think contempt of self has no place except in those extremely rare cases of an arrogant nature, overpoweringly selfish. But in general childhood is so frail, so astonished at the novelty of life and with a rebound so easily broken that a feeling of personal dignity is of far greater help for good and should be first awakened.

p. 400



Overflowing with good will, devotedness, activity, we let ourselves too often be carried by the current...We do not think, learn, ripen, take responsibility to hear and, remaining children, we reach the 'high seas' of mature life without sufficient preparation for its more difficult navigation...In the second period the principle and virtues which ought to have been acquired are put to the test – it is in middle age that the interest of a life attains its highest point. The opposing forces, long prepared, are brought face to face in a decisive struggle, and the result establishes our life in holiness or in mediocrity. When this last triumphs the cause has generally been discouragement, which lowers the ideal, and makes one lose the faith of religious life, then follows sadness, bitterness, inaction. Yet this is a time of great power for good, of magnificent second conversions. It is the age of great awakenings, of new beginnings, hastened by the thought that time is passing.

p. 425

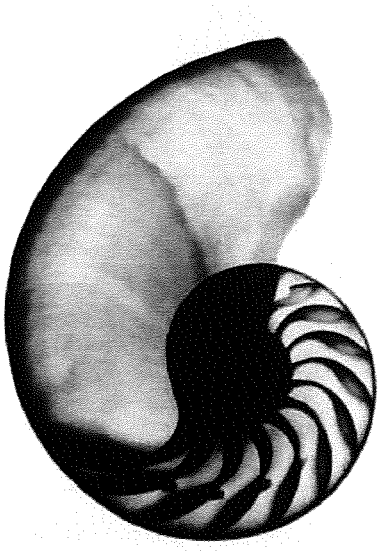
It has been said that every Christian, called by that title to be a saint, some portion of the life and character of Our Lord has as it were been entrusted, that they may show it forth in their own lives, and a continual representation of His life on earth may be found in the Church, his living body. To some it has been given to show forth His passion, in others the poverty of Christ is resplendent. In Mother Stuart's life we see perhaps an image of the love of Christ for humankind.

p. 468

If one only knew that one would come out safe on the other side. Yes, I know, but that cannot be, when one is trying for such high things as we are, the higher we want to fly, the greater the risk, but run – with no assurance but our trust in God, that seems to me to be the essence of our life and its beauty. This will grow upon you, and you will get your balance in the risks, and get to love them. That is faith and hope. One can trot along on the earth in great safety, but it is not so well worth it.

p. 479

Additional Mother Stuart Quotes From a Variety of Sources



Joys and sorrows are meant to exist in the same soul. They are meant to follow each other in regular succession. We should never attain sanctity if we had nothing but joy. God fixes the proportion of each that is best for each soul, thus, joy is the herald of sorrow and sorrow of joy. They come like seasons upon the ground. The winter has the promise of spring, so sorrow the promise of joy. Joy rests on the personal action of Our Lord himself in each life. He personally handles this life, adjusting it day by day to our capabilities and our correspondence. When we feel ourselves in such a master-hand we may well be hopeful. Every joy ought to widen our horizon, enrich our sympathy, tenderness and forbearance.

Try to render all possible service to others, not talking of the thing, but doing it. If you are known to be a person who loves to serve, many opportunities will come your way, to your great inconvenience, perhaps, but to your far greater profit and instruction.

We must remember that each one of our children is destined for a mission in life. Neither we nor they can know what it is, but we must know and make them believe that each one has a mission in life and that she is bound to find out what it is, that there is some special work for God which will remain undone unless she does it, some place in life which no one else can fill...We must bring home to our children and to ourselves also, the responsibilities for our gifts. We must put our talents at interest and not bury them in the earth and the reason is sufficient, that they are God's.

A bird does not sing because it has an answer; it sings because it has a song.

Events are the sacraments of the will of God.

To give the message that God has entrusted to one, to accomplish one's mission and to do one's work, it is essential to be oneself. We must never try to be copies of the other. However excellent the model, copies are always deplorable. God never meant for us to be copies. If we imitate too closely the actions of another, we are not truly ourselves, and we cannot give the true, the real note that we should give when speaking with our own voice.

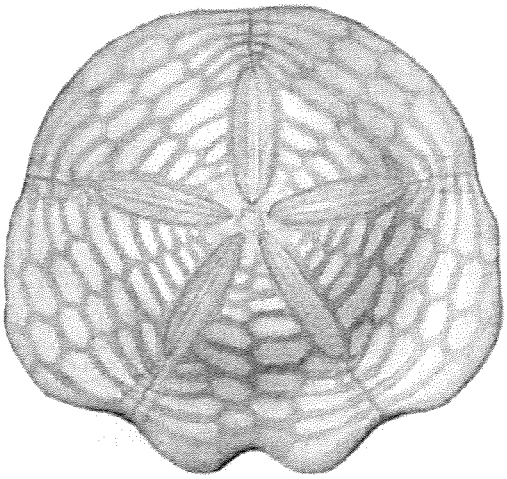
We are all God's property, and your life must be one wild bird's song of praise, one wild flower's face looking up to God.

Let us keep our faces turned like the sunflower always toward the Sun of Justice.

A runner to win the prize must despise everything else: fatigue, comfort, praise, any ties that would hold back or interfere with the single-hearted purpose to run till the prize is attained. That was the kind of person we should have seen had we known St. Stanislaus...he shone as a star of first magnitude, as a racer who bounded to the front at once by his uncalculating generosity and the single-heartedness of his love.

We take our children as a trust and train them for eternity. As trustees, we are given charge of these minors...We are responsible under the trust to keep them from evil and train them to good: to whatever things are true, modest, just, holy, lovely, of good fame, in which there is any virtue or praise of discipline. Remember that the principal end is training to good; keeping from evil is not an end but a condition. A soul kept from evil for a time, not trained for positive good, to discern, to act, to judge, to do good, would leave us quite unfit for life. Whereas one leaving us even young and undeveloped, but having a positive love for good, an attraction for it and some practice, is fitted for life, at least to begin the battle. Our education would be quite a failure if we turned out nonentities without color or character or individuality.

She knew that each child is unique and that there can be no real educative influence unless it happens person to person. Each child is not merely one of a group. He or she has personal interests, tastes, reactions, hopes, fears, a background built up of varied experiences. Not only do children differ from each other, but the same child differs from one day to another. A good teacher should be able to read even their thoughts and see their dispositions in their faces...and ask of a shy or withdrawn child, "Is it my fault?" Is it fear which prevents her from coming out of her shell? Is there not a spring that I can touch within her?



Self control is so vital to the conduct of life that no price is too great for the habit; it is so indispensable that no kind of duty can be well done without it, and no action is too small in which to practice it. It is a vain expectation to hope that self control and unselfishness will come forth at command in a crisis, when they have not been practiced in the small occurrences of daily life. The rare crises of daily life reveal us to ourselves, but we are made in the small victories of defeats of every day.

Cultivate the wish to learn rather than the wish to be taught. Be determined to 'pick up' and do not wait for the professor and the pedagogical devices of his or her craft...Do not think that lessons will do it, if you wait for lessons, you will wait a life time...If we want to be taught, we shall never learn.

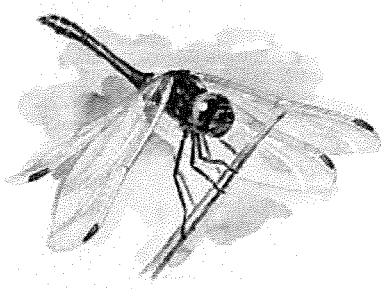
Beware of extremes, beware of inhuman efforts, of violent measures, of all that drives you off balance...Do not attempt the impossible...Take yourself as you are, whole, and do not try to live by one part alone and starve the other. Control, but do not kill...

Those who make the most demands on us really render us the greatest service. This is true for us and for our children.

We are called to a fuller, richer, higher life within...called to work with God, to walk with God, to have influence with God...

The Society of the Sacred Heart has been singularly blessed by God: in the littleness of its origin, in the providential assistances and trials through which it came into being, in its first rapid extension. It has been blessed in the persecution which has followed it through many countries, driving the native members from their homeland until all the world has become their country. It has been blessed in the faithful and devoted friendships, which have never failed it, and even in the bitter and tenacious prejudices which have not been wanting from the beginning until our own day to keep it vigilant and awake. It has been blessed in the strokes of adversity, which have come upon it and in the almost visible interference of God; warding them off or carrying it through each trouble as it arose. It is blessed, most of all, in the special bond of unity which joins all the members together; so strongly that those who see it have declared that no human power could have welded so many diverse spirits and nationalities in one whole and that without doubt, the finger of God is here.

The only way to govern is to love; we must have a trust, a deep, personal, individual affection for those we serve...This is a woman's order, and we must be governed in a woman's way – by the heart, not by logic. The heart is the mainspring of a woman's government. Therefore, anything that takes us nearer to the heart of people is our great power. Unselfishness and love are our levers.



Religious souls ought to be led by charity rather than severity. Our Lord's government was solely based on love and charity.

We do not always realize that we need never fear to love too much, but rather not to love enough...When we speak of loving too much we mean in reality not loving enough; we mean loving some to the exclusion of others, and above all, we mean self seeking and love of self. Therefore, that we may enter more fully into the spirit of our vocation, let us love more and more. Let us fear any want of sympathy, exclusiveness, local or national spirit, a tendency toward criticism. Let us love frankly, loyally, generously as our Lord has loved us.

There are two ways of educating: one, to give heart, mind, energy, everything to working for the children – doing things for them. The other, to try to teach the children to work for themselves. And this is the higher of the two. It requires more prudence, more foresight and there is less immediate return. We ought not to do things for the children which they ought to learn to do for themselves. We want to make them independent of us.

A diploma is not an end, it is a beginning.

Extracts From Mother Stuart's Spiritual Writings

Do not give up any high aspirations, aim at the very highest and the best, but understanding that to get this is a life's work, not the work of a day, so never let failure cast down or disappoint you, but always begin again with great courage and especially great confidence. Our Lord will always help you...

You know your life is all right, and you trust God utterly and don't mind things being weird and unaccountable, do you? Because you know that He knows all about it, and will make it all right in the end. All crooked things will go right, and the word will come into the riddle, and the key into the puzzle, and we shall be so delighted to think that it was right all along and that we trusted Him when things were darkest and most incomprehensible.

You must not take a failure so much to heart. You must cultivate hopeful courage in God's service, and remember all our life there must be falls and failures from time to time to keep us steeped in humility and contrition, so "off again, on again, away again."

Ejaculatory prayers are so concentrated, so beautiful, so much is expressed in one word, "Come." Come is the word God condescends to say to us. Throughout the ages He made use of it. It is the word that Our Lord used so often during his life; it is one of the most ordinary words and He chose it as one of His most intimate ways of calling us. It is a word of vocation, "Come and follow me," "Come nearer," "Come higher, follow me more closely." We must be very attentive because often that Come is not said loudly.

Love is the gift of self; all forms of the gift of self for the love of Christ are devotion to the Sacred Heart.

My favorite prayer is "Lead her" lead her through, right through and straight through, but on the way, lead her safe over the fences, safe through the brambles, and straight over the water jumps of this life. You are in it now and I am sure often puzzled what is best and truest to do and longing for clear light and a strong heart to follow it. I will pray daily for you. You do not know what prayers can do, making impossible things possible. God will help you, and if you keep hold of the deepest things you know and keep hold of God, you may go through very hard days, but you can never go under.

We must go to the duties which contain for us the will of God and the means of growing in His service and love. It does not matter what or where, we will take it as it comes. And if the sea of life is angry and troublesome for our navigation, we shall bear in mind that the harbor lights will surely appear one day, perhaps soon, and we shall be in port.

Take up your cross...the cross is different for each one, so we often make the mistake of thinking that we could bear any other better than our own – but our own is the only one we can bear, whether it be our character, our duty, or some suffering; it is the cross that God has portioned out to us, and we must carry it gladly, without hesitation, enthusiastically, even, as He did, and He carried both ours and His. Ours is light in comparison. Daily...not tomorrow's but today's cross with today's graces and today's opportunities.

The closed garden – who has the key to it? Nobody knows except those who have it and the one who gave it. And who one knows what lies within it. But we guess at that. 1903

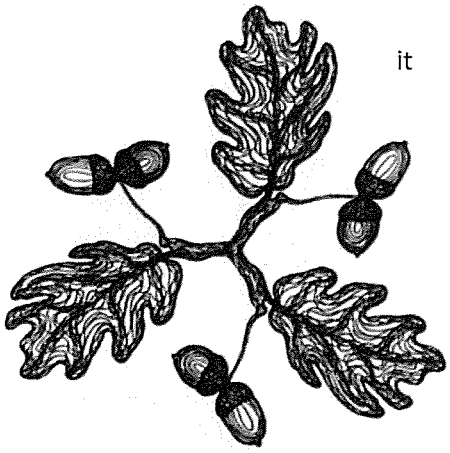
We must always be more or less lonely, but sometimes it is given to spirit to touch spirit...then we understand and are understood.

The Methods of Prayer...when explained by masters with experimental knowledge, do not constrain...but set at liberty, with the liberty that comes of looking beyond the letter to reach the spirit and the real intention – what must have been meant – and with the liberty that comes of not being afraid to be oneself, most of all in prayer. *Society of the Sacred Heart,* 1914

Every friendship with God and every love between God and a soul is the only one of its kind.

You begin every day, just where you are, not matter where. It is always *here* and always *now.*

Straight across the Highway comes another current of travelers, that of the by-ways who go...because go they must, and it is not evident where they are going. There pass the inspired people, the seers, poets in contemplation, shepherds and sons of the soil who hide under irresponsive faces, strange gleams of the unseen world, shadows of inarticulate fears and hopes still more unutterable; there pass...all the uncounted seekers after that which can never be known, and lovers of that which always lies beyond. The people of the other world are attracted by the by-ways, where the mysteries call them onward, and the shy nightengales sing, and the stress of life is lifted off, and the ticking of time is still. Where it is no longer the chronometer that divides the seconds, but the sun that runs the day, and the moon and stars that govern the night'; where life seems larger because of silence and calm, where the soul may be invaded and taken captive unresisting by the powers of the world to come; where the mind learns to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for the heart's desire, where the conviction grows that at long last all things come home to their God.



Three months before her death – Symbols and images given by God in prayer are one of His ways of teaching. Why be afraid of what God offers? Even if these things were solely from the imagination, why should He not teach by the way He chooses? Don't' be suspicious of them; these are His graces; delicate exotic things that we must not handle. Take them with reverent gratitude, and if He takes them from us, learn to live without them...God takes them away by degrees, they do their work in our soul. But these flashes of His presence are only the road to contemplation and not the goal itself.

Our Lord calls those in the Society who have an understanding of their vocation to a degree of intimacy and friendship far above any that they can imagine or desire...We shall not fully know what it means to have been called to religious life until we get to heaven. God has called us to the fullest spiritual life of which we are capable. The stop will always be put by ourselves. It will always be what Our Lord Himself said over Jerusalem, "I would...but you would not," and the finish of understanding that God looks for in those who profit by His training is liberty of spirit, freedom in the House of God. 1914

Entering the Society of the Sacred Heart she had found that it was the school of His own Heart that God had called her...that though consecrated and set apart to work for the salvation of others...yet she was bound henceforth to make it her most sacred duty and sweet occupation to contemplate, study and know intimately the Heart of Our Lord. For no human model, however perfect, would Heart was to be an open book in which all was to be read. M. Monahan

If really lived, our life has nothing to envy any other. But it must be so anchored in the land of faith and hope, so faithful in renunciation, so full of prayer, and washed daily by contrition.

You have just come to a hard place where the two currents meet, and you could let yourself be beaten back towards the shore; but you can, instead, bend your back to the oars and pull the boat for all you are worth across the rough bit, and it will be better when you get out of the cross-currents. Hold on and let nothing dismay you. You may have to change your means; don't change your purpose. Remember you are doing God's work and God is with you, and all His saints are looking on, a great cloud of witnesses, while you fight in the arena, and they, too have fought and overcome, so they know what they say when they say, 'Well done.'

Above all remember that you are the cherished object of Our Lord's most tender love. May He convince you of this.

Life is a solitude, and yet as Our Lord said, 'I am not alone, for the Father is with me.' Though perhaps three hundred and sixty four days out of the year we cannot feel it. But you know that beyond your own erratic guidance and the plunging of the chariot, a hand has guided your life, and kept your safe through many a storm, beyond what you could do for yourself, and that same guidance will bring you into the port at last.

One can never see a thing exactly as it is, if one looks too closely at it. It loses all proportion. So I think you judge yourself as worse than you are, and no one can judge themselves quite fairly. God alone can do this; but the judgment of others on us is often truer than our own...

There must be pain and darkness and unsearchable mysteries and insoluble problems, but there again, in case of doubt, hold on. Wait for God to explain Himself in eternity. It would be childish to think that we could understand in time. But never let go of the belief that God is the All Good.

1910 – As far as we are concerned God means things to be just as they are, what does happen and what does not happen. So never wish them otherwise by a hair's breadth. All our raw material for sanctity is in the now just as it is; and if it had not the two elements, the one that we do not understand and the one that we should not choose, it would not be what it is to us.

Judge kindly; that is the heart of everything.

To one who wanted to enter the Society – July 1912 – It did not make me laugh at all, as you thought it would but it made me very happy for you. Because if God has really given you a vocation to the Society of the Sacred Heart, then, I think, God has looked through all His treasures and given you the best, because He has called you to a life that is both hard and beautiful – very like His own, and based on friendship with Him, the very most beautiful thing in all life. May He give you the grace to be always faithful.