

Love of the Cross¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, March 12, 1861

[...]

In our last meeting, I spoke to you about Christian mortification; we will continue this topic and complete it. From the pulpit you hear, and from books you read that you must love the cross. It is already admirable to suffer with patience, but the truth is that we must love the cross. Whoever does not yet love the cross is not a true disciple, a follower of Jesus crucified. You ask: How can you love something that makes you suffer? Corporal penance makes us suffer, mortification of the heart, even more. These things are not loveable. We call them penance and agony – we don't love death.

That's true, my Sisters. Penance is not loveable; mortification of the body makes us suffer, as also that of the heart. [...] **Persons who want to love the cross in itself desire something almost impossible.** What do you expect, my poor Daughters? I make an act of penance, fine; I make an act of virtue, in hope of a reward – that is my motivation. From this to the motivation of love is quite different. And, all who stop there do not have the spirit, do not love the cross – their love is misplaced. They make a few mortifications for a few days, but they do not persevere. No need to kill ourselves: if only we could shorten our days in order to go to heaven; but they don't persevere. They wanted to do too much, and now they are resting. If life were always like that, we could not persevere.

There are some who like mere words; (but) **we need love – that is what makes crosses loveable.** Only our Lord Jesus Christ can make crosses loveable. It is by loving *Jesus, and Jesus crucified* (cf. 1 Cor 2:2), said St. Paul, that we can love them – since we cannot separate the cross from Jesus crucified and his love. If we don't love Jesus, we will not love the cross and penance. Some fruits cannot be eaten, they are too bitter. Add sugar and they become excellent; their bitterness is changed into goodness. Take all your crosses, place them in our Lord, by making them so to speak melt in him, and you will begin seeing the cross as the most tender object of his love for you and for all his followers. Place the cross in the attractiveness of the love of our Lord, and it becomes beautiful and loveable –like green wood, that does not give heat, nor light nor warmth. But, placed in a blazing fire, it becomes the life of the fire. That is how the cross that had been an instrument for execution has now become loveable in the heart of our Lord.

Here, there are two things: if I love the cross for myself, for my own interested love, for my perfection, that will not last long – my love will not reach the point of heroism. On the other hand, since our Lord and his cross cannot be separated – it is his scepter, his crown, and his very love – , then we must place the cross in our Lord. There will be no need to feed it, since I will always have the flame and the hearth; I will feed it with the love of the cross and of mortification. I don't remain in my cross: a prison is always a prison; I don't remain in its reality, but in its grace. This is a grace of love: I take it; I carry it completely in our Lord. He wants it, and that is enough for me. In this way, my heart at least has some consoling thought, I could even say, some joyful thought.

¹ Number 304. *La prière qu'on nous demande. L'amour de la croix.* (The prayer that is required of us. Love of the Cross.

We must live outside of our sacrifice, as the martyrs did. We might say: The martyrs suffered only for a moment. Some tortures certainly lasted for months and years; it was a slow death. What was our Lord doing? He was giving them the joy of his love. There is a fire in me that is bigger than the fire that burns me, said St. Laurence. God gave them a greater love, and they triumphed over their sufferings and their executioners. The wild beasts became as gentle as lambs; the fires went out; often an angel held a crown encouraging them to give their life. They saw the heavens open, like St. Steven (cf. Acts 7:56) – God sent them an angel or the Blessed Virgin. He placed the soul of his servants in his grace of love, and they were victorious. We should not live in sacrifice: our soul is on a battlefield – do not resist too violently. Every life needs a center: either the love of God or self-love.

Give a certain joy to your crosses, as St. Bernard said, speaking about some good crosses. I wish this joy to you; it gives strength, and strength will be victorious and always triumph over sacrifice. We also have a false idea about love: we seek always a calm state, like in heaven. Calm does not last long on the stormy ocean of the world. God gives it to us for a short time, to make us progress faster. We seek also the joy of emotional love, to feel that the Good Lord is happy with us, that he loves us, and that we are headed towards heaven. Once in a while, God lets us see some breakthroughs – *work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12), says St. Paul. If there were not occasional eclipses, we could not do so.

There is an error among devout persons: they imagine that the victorious love of our Lord always goes hand-in-hand with the joyfulness of this love. That's not possible. How would you explain the abandonment felt by our Lord on the cross and in the Garden of Olives? Didn't the Blessed Virgin experience being sad? Yet she loved God very much, and so did St. Joseph. [...] Don't you think that the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph spoke to each other about the passion of our Lord? You have only to read the prophet Isaiah, who spoke even more clearly than the evangelists. Did they not love our Lord? [Indeed,] they loved him all the more.

The greatest love is that which receives God's guidance, when God seems to abandon the soul, and let it suffer for all sinners. In this way, don't you think Moses suffered when God came down on Mt. Sinai, and when lightening had wiped out half of the Israeli camp? The people had been idolatrous, and risen up against Moses. And Moses prayed: *Lord, you must pardon them; I cannot bear to be separated from my people* (cf. Ex 32:32). And Moses prevailed.

Love must have its struggles. Unlike the love experienced by a child feeding on the delicious milk of its mother's breast, love must pass through Calvary, or the desert, or exposed to diabolical and human temptations, and be struck by the storms – that is love. It perseveres come what may. Love is as strong as death (cf. Sg 8:6), even stronger than death – that is the true meaning.

Let us move on, my poor Daughters; love the cross in our Lord. Increase your love for our Lord, and your love of the cross will follow quite naturally. Love the cross – it is the child of your love, as I told you; it is the scepter of your love. Since it came from his heart, the heart would give it life if it could, but it cannot ignite a piece of wood. That is why St. Paul said: *the cross is Jesus crucified in me* (cf. Gal 2:19-20). **Ah! My poor Daughters, if only you could understand this beautiful thought: the cross is Jesus crucified in me.**

- ❖ Cf. “**The Spirit. To Serve with Devotion and Abnegation. To Lose Oneself in God**”, August 13, 1861: Book # 2
- ❖ “**The Spirit of Love and Sacrifice**” August 20, 1861, Book # 2 B



Points for reflection:

Read this instruction in relation with the preceding one and those in the following references. They contain the complete teaching of our Founder during the Lent of 1861 on the question of suffering.