

Why Our Lord Suffered. Why We Must Suffer¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
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Today, the Church celebrates the feast of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. All the Fridays of Lent are dedicated to celebrate an aspect of the Passion. In this way, the Church divides the mysteries of the Passion, so that we can better appreciate them, calling them to mind one at a time.

Since we are meditating on the passion of our Lord, one recurring question is this: [...] Why does the love of God have its perfection in very great suffering? **Why did the Son of God suffer?** He could have shown his love to us in another way. This was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the pagans (cf. 1 Cor 1:23), and it still is for Christians. Why does he place his reign in the cross? The answer is easy: he chose suffering in order to redeem us.

Since all sin is done for pleasure or through pleasure, our Lord wanted to crucify everything in himself, so that the expiation would be adequate, would be a contrary act. For example, pride is the pleasure of the mind: our Lord wanted *to make satisfaction and be covered with oppression* (cf. Is 53:2-6), as Isaiah said. In order to expiate the pleasure of pride, he appeared as the least of men. By despising him, people thought they were giving honor to God: he became an object of scorn. **That is what our Lord suffered in his mind.**

Our Lord suffered in his heart. The greatest pleasure on earth is to attach oneself to what is good and beautiful by an unruly (uncontrolled) affection. Our Lord suffered much more in his heart than in his body; he even told us: *My soul is sorrowful even to death* (Mt 26:38). His suffering was so great that his heart could burst. God abandoned him to the horrors of his passion. His sadness had to be immense so as to show us his great suffering. He was abandoned by all and betrayed; no one defended him before the tribunal; he was abandoned and delivered over to the executioner in a unique way. They did with him what they wanted – something that is never done to one who is condemned to die: once a man is condemned, he is shown a certain compassion. But his executioners scourged and insulted him – they treated him worse than what could be done to a beast. Our Lord had to suffer all of that, abandoned by his friends. The Blessed Virgin was not there, she was neither at the tribunal nor at the praetorium. She could have consoled our Lord, but he did not want it. She was at the foot of the cross. No doubt, this was a consolation for our Lord, but for his heart it was like two oceans of sadness.

Our Lord suffered very much in his heart. No one sympathized with him – I'm not speaking of the Blessed Virgin. When he came into this world, there were shepherds and a few good souls who loved him; but in his passion, he had no one. We don't understand this: we were never abandoned by all – if we felt abandoned by God, there was someone, an angel, or a good thought that consoled us.

Our Lord suffered much in his body. Why? In order to expiate the sins of the flesh. The body is sensual and lazy: it seeks to satisfy its senses – the eyes want to see, the ears want to hear, the mouth wants to enjoy its food. The prophet says: *There was not a place on his body for a new wound – from the sole of the foot to the head there is no sound spot* (cf. Is 1:5-6). Why? Our Lord had to expiate all our sins: he *was stricken as one covered with leprosy* (cf. Is 53:2-5), as the prophet said. This was to atone for

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sins, our own sins too. Every sin affected him. That is why he suffered, and why we also have a similar penance to atone for sin. Our state as sinners requires that we suffer a little disgrace, at least a little.

Our heart has offended our Lord by its neglect, by its infidelity to grace; it is only right that it should suffer. Our body has offended him; it is only right that it do penance as the Church requires, and as piety might require. What is not done in this world, will be done in the next. The more we have offended God, the more ought we to do penance. We might say: One act of love of God wipes away sins – but anyone who relies on this one act, thinking that he is dispensed from doing penance, does not have a perfect act of love. Suffering is the means of expiation, but if it were merely that, we must admit that it would not be very attractive: I would pay my debts, yes, but it would be too sad: we need another thought, that of the love of God.

The love of God reaches its true perfection only in suffering – the greater the love of God is, the greater the suffering. Holy people suffer much because they free themselves of their own selves and of their self-love: this purification is a kind of slow martyrdom, accepted daily, by which they die to themselves for our Lord – only one who has experienced it can understand this. **Whoever has little love will have only a little suffering.** A great love has need of great suffering to sustain itself. The actions that can be accomplished in this world do not equal the desire of a soul. Our Lord gives it suffering or the desire for suffering that becomes the nourishment of this hearth. In this way, one does by suffering what it cannot do with its hands through works of zeal – and so, through suffering, it does tremendous work. Did our Lord do a lot of walking in the Garden of Olives? Did he speak much on the cross? He said seven words (cf. Mt 27:46; Lk 23:34,43,46; Jn 19:26,28,30), but he suffered immensely. That is why he works hard for us; love that suffers does more than one who is constantly coming and going.

[...] Our Lord does not grant his favors to those who are not willing to suffer. He cannot[...]. The royalty of love is suffering. He was crucified with large nails. He had a throne, but this throne was on the cross. He has a crown, but this crown is a crown of thorns. When he shares his royal love, he gives it only to one who is magnanimous. You might ask: Every time that I suffer, is it to expiate my sins? Yes, you can suffer for your sins, but it is also an exercise of love – that depends on you.

There is a third reason. Our Lord said: *Be the light of the world and the salt of the earth* (cf. Mt 5:13-14). We understand the meaning of light, but why salt? Salt is used to prevent corruption: a body that has died is placed in salt, and it will become incorruptible. Whatever we place in salt will be protected and preserved from corruption. Our body is corruptible, tending to corruption: our heart has unruly affections. What does our Lord do to preserve the purity of our soul and body? He places them in the salt of mortification: he embalms them. Embalming is done with myrrh, which is very bitter, and with aloes, which is also a bitter substance. This tells us that if we want to preserve our purity and chastity, we must be embalmed in the mortification of the Savior. Notice that sweet things – unless they have reached the stage of crystallization – cannot be preserved: sweet things cannot be saved. A love that is sweet and joyful, shall I say childish, will not last long, because the soul finds it too attractive and seeks itself. That is what happened to the apostles in their great happiness on Tabor: it was easy for them (cf. Mt 17:4). But when our Lord spoke to them about his passion, they did not want to listen, to the point that our Lord scolded them. That's human nature.

What does our Lord want? That we embalm him in mortification. That is why our Lord is always before your eyes as crucified. We ask ourselves why he didn't present himself differently: why didn't he have himself represented as he was in Nazareth, or performing miracles, something beautiful. There is nothing more unsightly than to see our Lord on a cross, naked, his heart pierced, his blood flowing. If we were not accustomed to it, we could feel nausea. Why did he choose crucifixion? In order to tell us how much he suffered and show us the limits of our love. He is there, like the bronze serpent in the past (cf. Nm 21:9), the medicine for our sins. Worldliness sees only the cross and the nails, but for us the cross is a

grace, the cross is love and goodness; therefore, the cross is not repulsive for us. In this case, we must attach ourselves to our Lord: his nails are not riveted, his nails are pointed on both ends, so that each of us can be bound, and become only one victim, a single host for the glory of our Lord.

There is only one danger, namely: as you listen to me, you don't believe me. I'm not convinced – I who am speaking, I'm not convinced. You must be less convinced than I am. My mission is to talk – it is not that of grace. I'm not convinced, because I don't love the Good Lord sufficiently. If we loved him, we would have this conviction. We don't love him, because we love this woeful life too much. We will realize the value of suffering only in heaven; high time, since we can no longer suffer. We should say: My God, do not wait until heaven. Or else, it will be in purgatory that we will know the value of suffering; there, we can no longer say: My God, I offer this to you – it will no longer be a flower, but a debt. I will not talk about hell.

We would like to have a few flowers on our cross. I like the catacombs very much – you have not yet seen them, since you are always in your little nests. In Rome, near the catacombs, there are churches, over the tombs of the martyrs – very nice, dating to the first centuries. We see the churches and confessionals. What is especially remarkable is to see the painted crosses. In St. Agnes and in St. Pontian, we never see crosses as we see them here. The early Christians had more creativity than we do. All the crosses are decorated with flowers and candles. I used to say: how beautiful! They must have loved God very much: the cross was a victory for them – for us, it is rather an altar of sacrifice.

Let us ask to understand thoroughly the mystery of the cross, to understand thoroughly the love of our Lord. Let's be clear: evidently our physical body does not like suffering, our heart does not like sacrifice – that reaction comes only from the old self, that's all. We must not listen to it: it is our sinful self – but the other (the new self) will become stronger, as it is crucified the more.



Points for reflection:

A Christian must keep his eyes on our Lord. Here is the beauty of this teaching. Only the sufferings of Christ give meaning and strength to our own. Note the text: **“For us the cross is a grace, the cross is love and unction; therefore, the cross is not repulsive to us.”**