

Digitized by the Internet Archive in 2022 with funding from Kahle/Austin Foundation

MONASTERY OF ST. ALPHONSUS REDEMPTORISTINE NUNS LIGUORI, MISSOURI



The Cross of Jesus

Cross and Crown Series of Spirituality

GENERAL EDITOR

Very Reverend John L. Callahan, O.P., S.T.M.

LITERARY EDITOR

Reverend Jordan Aumann, O.P., S.T.D.

NUMBER 9



THE CROSS OF JESUS

BY Louis Chardon, O.P.

VOLUME ONE

TRANSLATED BY

Richard T. Murphy, O.P.

260 CH COPYI

B. HERDER BOOK CO.

15 & 17 South Broadway, St. Louis 2, Mo. AND 33 Queen Square, London, W.G.

This is a translation of *La Croix de Jésus*, by Louis Chardon, O.P., published by Editions du Cerf, of Paris. All rights reserved.

NIHIL OBSTAT

J. S. Considine, O.P., S.T.M. J. L. Callahan, O.P., S.T.M.

IMPRIMI POTEST

John E. Marr, O.P., S.T.M. Provincial

NIHIL OBSTAT

J. S. Considine, O.P., S.T.M.

IMPRIMATUR

Archbishop of Chicago

January 14, 1957

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 57-9133

COPYRIGHT 1957 BY B. HERDER BOOK CO.

Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, New York

Introduction &

FATHER Louis Chardon was born at Clermont-de-l'Oise in France on March 12, 1595, and was baptized by the name of John. He pursued his higher studies at the University of Paris, where he seems to have learned as much from his association with brilliant minds as from books and lectures. As the son of one of the better families, he had ready access to the circles of the wealthy and the well-educated.

At the age of twenty-three Chardon entered the Dominican Order at the convent of the Annunciation in Paris. He received the habit in May of 1618 and was given the name of Louis in religion. At that time the apostolate of the Dominican friars in Paris was almost entirely an intellectual one and that fact alone would seem to have been the strongest natural motivation for Chardon's entrance into the Dominican Order.

Father Chardon was fifty-two when he published his first work and he was to live for only four years more. Previous to that, he had held the office of assistant master of novices in the Paris convent until 1632, when he was designated as "ordinary preacher" for the convent in Toulouse. In 1645 he returned to Paris, where he divided his time be-

tween the direction of souls and the preparation of his writings. He died of the plague in August of 1651.

Works

In addition to his masterpiece, *The Cross of Jesus*, Chardon wrote six other books. The first to appear was a life of St. Samson, published in 1647, the same year in which *The Cross of Jesus* appeared. It is not a book of spirituality in the strict sense of the word but it has been designated by critics as a model of historical criticism.¹ It gives evidence of Chardon's affective spirituality and almost forbidding severity when he insists time and again that the imitation of Christ is achieved only by abnegation and death to self.

In 1648 Chardon published a French translation of the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena. It was the second French version of this spiritual classic and the only one to appear during the seventeenth century. Rather than use the traditional titles, Treatise on Divine Providence or Book of Mercy, he called his translation The Doctrine of God as Taught by St. Catherine of Siena. The division of the work is arbitrary, the translation is free, but the language is magnificent. In his Introduction Chardon again stresses the importance of imitating Christ through suffering and the cross.

The following year, 1649, Chardon published a small work on the art of meditation. Unfortunately, the work is no longer extant, for it would have been interesting to compare the teaching of Chardon with that of Father Ridolfi, O.P., (1578–1650) who also wrote a treatise on the same subject.

¹ Cf. Father Francis Florand's Introduction to *La Croix de Jésus* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1937), which has been the primary source for the present Introduction.

Introduction vii

Meditations on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared in 1650. Many books of meditation on the Passion had been written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most famous being that by Louis of Granada. Chardon's work, therefore, is not an innovation. Neither is it original in its division into daily meditations, for the same format was utilized by Jerome de Rebdorff in his Panis Quotidianus, a book of meditations published in 1509. What is original in Chardon's work is the structure of the meditations themselves. Each meditation is divided into a reflection and an affection or exhortation. The reflection is a commentary on the verse of Scripture which heads each meditation; the affection is an exhortation addressed to the reader in view of the reflection. The exhortation is eminently practical and sufficiently particularized to be effective. The treatise as a whole is not a haphazard assortment of meditations, but follows a logical and orderly development without becoming mechanical or inflexible. The meditations are simple and almost laconic, for Chardon leaves personal application to the reader. He exhorts the soul to imitate Christ, not in a general way or only in the lower grades of prayer, but to let itself be led by the Holy Ghost to the higher grades of prayer where the predominant note will be infused contemplation. Chardon is true to the traditional Dominican teaching concerning the one path to sanctity and the ultimate blending of the contemplative and active life as the fullest and most perfect expression of charity. The Meditations proved to be the most popular of all Chardon's works.

In the same year of 1650 Chardon published a French translation of Tauler's Institutiones Divinae.² In his Intro-

² Chardon never doubted that this work was written by Tauler, but modern critics generally maintain that it is a compilation of texts from Tauler, Eckhard, Ruysbroeck, and Surius.

duction he states that in presenting the translation to French readers he has no other intention than that of Tauler himself, namely, to lead souls to the perfection of charity in the mystical state. In an age when ascetical theology was receiving great emphasis as distinct from mystical theology, Chardon states that Tauler's treatise will teach souls how to love God and neighbor, uproot their vices and stifle self-love, control the movements of nature and become aware of the movements of grace, and ultimately become conformable to the death of Christ by carrying their crosses with Him through every manner of suffering until they acquire heroic virtue and begin to enjoy divine communications of the loftiest kind. For Chardon, as for Tauler, there is only one Christian perfection and this perfection can be attained through the normal and ordinary development of the supernatural organism of grace and the virtues and gifts.3

DOCTRINAL SOURCES

The primary source of Chardon's spiritual doctrine was the Epistles of St. Paul, which he quotes constantly. He does not seem to have been influenced to any great extent by any particular Father of the Church, although he quotes the Fathers occasionally to substantiate the main theme of his work, especially the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius on contemplation.

As is to be expected, Chardon followed faithfully the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, his insistence on the unity of the spiritual life, the mystical state as the

³ Quétif-Echard, in his *Scriptores O.P.*, also mentions another work by Chardon: the life of Brother Simon Baliévre, a short biography which was later inserted in the *Année dominicaine*.

normal development of the life of grace and the virtues, the divine indwelling as the fundamental doctrine in the theology of the spiritual life, and his explanation of our membership in the mystical body of Christ are all in complete accord with Thomistic doctrine.

Among the secondary doctrinal sources first place must be given to the Flemish school, and especially in regard to its teaching on purification. Chardon also had a great admiration for St. Francis de Sales and he is definitely Salesian in his humanism. He mentions St. Teresa of Avila but makes no explicit reference to St. John of the Cross, although it is certain that the Carmelite Doctor would have given full approbation to the doctrine contained in *The Cross of Jesus*.

In his teaching on the mystical subsistence between Christ and the just soul and in his doctrine on Christ's inclination to suffering from the first moment of His conception, Chardon greatly resembles Bérulle, although he cannot be called a disciple of Bérulle, for he is merely repeating the doctrine of the commentators on Cajetan. In his teaching on the mystical body he bears a strong resemblance to St. John Eudes, for whom the doctrine of the mystical body was a central point in his mystical teaching. However, neither can it be said that Chardon belonged to the seventeenth-century French school of spirituality. His rigid Thomistic training made him much too austere to make any concessions to sentimentality or excessive sweetness.

What of Chardon's relation with classical and contemporary spiritual writers of his own Order? The doctrine of *The Cross of Jesus* is in perfect accord with Dominican spiritual teaching and above all with the tradition of the German Dominican school of spirituality. Devotion to

Christ crucified has always been an outstanding characteristic of Dominican spirituality, as is evident from the writings of St. Catherine of Siena, Savonarola, St. Vincent Ferrer, Tauler, Eckhard, Louis of Granada, and St. Catherine de Ricci. What distinguishes Chardon from other Dominican writers on the same subject is not the doctrinal content of *The Cross of Jesus*, but his closer adherence to the Thomistic method or presentation. Indeed, at times one can almost imagine that whole tracts of the work came from the pen of the Angelic Doctor himself.

THE CROSS OF JESUS

This work is at once speculative and practical, a happy blending of theological science and mystical experience. Using as his main theme the spiritual progress of the Christian through the cross of Christ, the author has grouped around it the principal doctrines of the spiritual life. The treatise as a whole is characterized by precision and logical order. The style is oratorical, filled with exclamations, rhetorical questions, and invocations. In content it is both original and exceptional, for it is a blending of Scholastic science, humanism, medieval mysticism, and modern piety. At first reading the doctrine appears to be austere but once understood it is a doctrine filled with consolation. The book itself was not written for professional theologians, but for holy souls.

Father Chardon knew from his experience as a director of souls that numerous devout Christians are astonished and dismayed at the amount of suffering which is encountered in the struggle for holiness. He realized that valiant and generous souls would never be intimidated by suffering and the cross, but that less courageous and more tepid

souls might very easily be discouraged by the prospect of intense suffering. Although he himself does not use the word "purification," that is what he is treating and it may be said that The Cross of Jesus is the first systematic study to appear on the subject in the entire history of spirituality. It is true that St. John of the Cross had described in great detail the purifications of the soul on the path to sanctity and that he laid down certain rules of conduct for the soul during these periods, but while St. John of the Cross discusses the subject within the framework of the functioning of the theological virtues, Chardon explains the suffering and purification of the soul by applying the Thomistic doctrine on the nature and function of sanctifying grace. This is not to infer that there is any incompatibility between the doctrine of Chardon and St. John of the Cross; if anything, Chardon's approach is more fundamental.

What is meant by the cross according to Chardon? Father Chesnois, another seventeenth-century Dominican, was to write somewhat later that the cross in the spiritual life signifies suffering, and the more painful the suffering, the more it deserves to be called a cross. Chardon is more precise. "When I speak of the cross," he says, "I understand that which, because of the separation which it causes in the faithful soul, disengages it from everything that gives sensible consolation in this life." Hence, for Chardon the cross means purification, either active or passive, and not merely reparation for sin.

Chardon is one of the most implacable spiritual writers of his century. He makes no concessions whatever. Although in his private life he was most benign and extremely sensitive to suffering, he realized that in spite of our distaste for suffering, there is no other way to complete union with Christ except through the cross. He meant his doctrine to encourage and console, but after the manner of the angel in the Garden of Gethsemani, who gave comfort to Christ without removing the bitter chalice of suffering.

The Cross of Jesus is divided into three sections, the first of which is a treatise on grace and the mystical body in view of the problem of suffering. Chardon demonstrates that the cross is the inevitable effect of grace in Christ, Mary, and the members of the mystical body. The second section is a practical illustration of the doctrine contained in the first section. Some critics consider this treatise a digression, but Christian souls will find in it much enlightenment and encouragement. Without mentioning them explicitly, Chardon refers to the three ways or stages of the road to perfection, although he prefers to emphasize the two states: consolation and desolation. Since the life of Christ was a continual movement toward the cross, the spiritual progress of the Christian will be measured by his approach to the cross. Even preserving the traditional threefold division of the spiritual life, one can say with Chardon that the beginners usually enjoy spiritual consolations, the proficients are those who enter upon desolation and suffering, and the perfect are those who at the apex of their desolation find perfect union with Christ. In the third section Chardon resumes the exposition of the doctrine on grace, not now as a participation in the life of Christ, but as a participation in the life of the Trinity. As a result, he speaks at length of the divine indwelling and the invisible missions of the Trinity and he explains in a masterful fashion how the cross of the Christian empties the soul of self-love and thus prepares a place for the divine indwelling.

Introduction xiii

Mystical subsistence. In addition to the physical subsistence of Christ, Chardon distinguishes a mystical subsistence which is constituted in Christ by grace and which He shares with the members of His mystical body. The existence of this mystical subsistence is verified by the Scriptural texts which allude to Christ's living again in His members and the origin of this subsistence is to be found in the very nature of sanctifying grace. There is, of course, only one sanctifying grace, and it is essentially the same in us as it is in Christ. Chardon refers to a double function of grace in Christ: first as a kind of disposition for the union of the human and divine natures, and secondly as a plenitude which Christ distributes to men who are members of His mystical body. Through our participation in the grace of Christ, we are united in some way to His uncreated essence and we enter into a mystical union with His divine Person. Thus do we subsist mystically in Christ and it can be said that as the divine Person of the Word is the hypostasis of the divine and human natures of Christ, so Christ Himself is the hypostasis of the mystical body.4

Christ's inclination to the cross. Since Christ and the members of His mystical body share the same mystical sub-

⁴ In the sixteenth century certain commentators on St. Thomas placed great emphasis on the plenitude of grace in Christ in order to establish the unity of the mystical body and to show that Christ is the universal principle of that body. For a verification of the notion of mystical subsistence, see Summa theologica, IIIa, q. 49, a. 1 and In III Sent., dist. 18, q. 1, ad 6um. Father James Nacchiante, a Dominican of Florence who was a follower of Cajetan, uses the concept of mystical subsistence. But the Thomistic doctrine on the mystical body reached its highest point at the hands of the Dominican, Father John Paul Nazari of Bologna, who was well acquainted with the theology of the Spanish Dominicans, especially Vitoria and Medina. Nazari also uses the expression "mystical subsistence."

sistence through grace, grace itself will produce in the Christian the same effect which it produced in Christ, namely, an inclination to the cross. And what was the extent of that inclination in Christ? It is the common teaching of theology that Christ endured suffering in the inferior part of His soul, for it was voluntarily excluded from the joy of the beatific vision. In attempting to estimate the extent of Christ's suffering, Chardon states that Christ was pre-occupied with suffering during His entire lifetime. Is not this an extravagant statement? Chardon would answer that Christ was truly a Man of Sorrows and that the only exception to the suffering and sorrow in the inferior part of His soul took place at the Transfiguration. Apart from that, His life was a continual martyrdom.

How does the teaching of Chardon compare with that of his contemporaries? Peter de la Coste ⁵ taught that Christ suffered from the moment of His birth until the end of His life. St. Robert Bellarmine ⁶ says that the entire life of Christ can be called a perpetual crucifixion. From the moment of His conception He realized that He was destined for the cross and He did not know an hour of repose. According to St. Francis de Sales,⁷ at the first moment of His incarnation our Savior began to experience the suffering He would later endure in full force in His passion. He deprived Himself of all consolations, and the inferior part of His soul was subject to sorrow, pain, fear, and apprehension. Bérulle and other writers of the Oratorian school express the same doctrine, as does St. John Eudes.⁸ Father

⁵ Cf. Catholiques expositions sur le symbole des Apôtres (Paris: 1557).

⁶ Cf. De gemitu columbae (1617).

⁷ Cf. Œuvres, IX, sermon 41 (1620).

⁸ Cf. Opuscules de piété, ed. Migne, p. 921; St. John Eudes, Royaume de Jésus, Part II, p. 43.

Thomas Leonardi, O.P., states that Christ was crucified from the first moment of His conception until the end of His life, and he cites the following as holding the same doctrine on the perpetual suffering of Christ: St. Albert the Great, Richard of St. Victor, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Thomas a Kempis, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Francis de Sales, Nieremberg, Lessius, and Suárez.

Therefore, Chardon's doctrine on Christ's suffering is not an innovation but is in conformity with the spiritual doctrine of his contemporaries. Nor is it a doctrine peculiar to the Dominican school of spirituality, as is evident from the variety of theologians who taught the same doctrine. Among nineteenth-century spiritual writers it is repeated in the works of Father Faber and Monsignor Gay. The doctrine itself rests securely on the teaching of St. Thomas, who maintains that Jesus is the Redeemer and that He is such through suffering. The purpose of His incarnation, as stated in Scripture, was to die for the salvation of men and even now in glory He is still a Victim, so far as He bears the wounds which will mark Him for all eternity as our Redeemer.

The cross and the mystical body. Knowing the extent of the suffering of Christ throughout His lifetime, we may ask to what degree, if any, the members of His mystical body will share His inclination to the cross. If the selfsame grace is found in Christ and the Christian and if Christ is said to live in the Christian, then we should expect that the same effects of grace, all things being equal, will be found in Christ and in the members of His mystical body. St. Thomas considers the sufferings sent by God as a sign of blessing and predilection and their absence as a sign of

malediction.⁹ In another place he asks why, if the passion of Christ has delivered us from the pains and penalties of sin, we still have to suffer death. He answers that Christ's passion not only does not remit suffering and death, but it exacts these things of us, for the same grace that made Him capable of suffering, makes us His members suffer.¹⁰

But does St. Thomas speak of the purifying sufferings to which Chardon obviously alludes? Do St. Thomas and Chardon refer to the same thing when they speak of the cross? In asking why the just suffer, St. Thomas replies that it is a question of justice and mercy.¹¹ However, in his commentary on the Gospel of St. John he specifically refers to suffering as a purification.12 But on one point of doctrine Chardon would seem to advance the doctrine of St. Thomas. He speaks of a type of purifying suffering which has nothing remedial about it but which is primarily a participation in the cross of Jesus, and this type of suffering he finds in Mary. Suffering was necessary for Mary, says Chardon, because of her affinity to Christ and to ensure her growth in charity. For St. Thomas the principal reason for suffering was vindicative or remedial, although he may have known of another type of suffering as taught by Pseudo-Dionysius.13 Stated very simply, Chardon's conclusion is that if we should imitate Christ and if to do so

¹⁰ Cf. Summa theol., IIIa, q.49, a.3; q.56, a.1, ad lum. Thomistic doctrine on the suffering of the members of the mystical body is substantiated by the teaching of St. Paul, who speaks of the suffering of the Christian as filling up that which is wanting in the mystical body.

Cf. Col. 1:23-24.

⁹ Cf. Comm. in epistolam ad Heb. 12:12. See also Summa theol., IIIa, q. 69, a. 1; a. 3; a. 7, ad lum, where St. Thomas speaks of our being engrafted on Christ.

¹¹ Cf. Summa theol., Ia, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3um.
¹² Cf. Comm. in evangelium S. Joannis, 9:12.
¹³ Cf. Summa theol., IIIa, q. 27, a. 3, ad 3um.

means to accept suffering and the cross, then the more the Christian accepts suffering, the more he imitates Christ. The same doctrine is expressed by St. Teresa of Avila in the nineteenth chapter of her Way of Perfection.

The Sorrowful Mother. "The measure of Mary's grace will be the measure of the cross." In these words Chardon expresses the fundamental reason for the suffering of the Mother of Christ. Other theologians have written about Mary's sufferings but few have probed so deeply into the theological explanation of her sorrows. The chapters which Chardon dedicates to the suffering of the Mother of Christ comprise some of the most beautiful pages in all Mariology.

Bérulle had stated that Mary began to share in the sufferings of Christ at the Annunciation. Chardon says that Mary finds her cross in her divine maternity, for her sufferings flow from her nearness to Christ, just as the plenitude of grace in her is explained by her nearness to Christ. Not content merely to repeat Cajetan's famous axiom that Mary's sanctity is proxime fines divinitatis, he states that her grace is singular and far above common grace. Not that Mary passes beyond the status of an adopted child of God, but she enjoys a unique position among all creatures. It is a theme dear to Chardon that since Christ's natural sonship precludes His adoptive filiation, as far as is possible this filiation is realized in Mary. In a word, Chardon would like to place Mary in a position above all other creatures and yet beneath Christ.

Mary endured the greatest suffering that is possible to a mother: that of delivering her child to suffering and pain. Thus, she who is first in grace among the children of men is also first in suffering and the cross. St. Augustine is quoted by St. Thomas in his commentary on the Gospel of

St. John as saying that whereas Christ's working of miracles came from the divine nature which He has from the Father, His ability to suffer came from the human nature which He has from His Mother.

Grace and the indwelling of the Trinity. When treating of grace, Chardon avoids all theological arguments and, following the custom of his contemporary spiritual writers, treats only of habitual or sanctifying grace, and that precisely as sanctifying. St. Thomas teaches that the grace received at baptism has a double function in the soul: it perfects the soul spiritually by assimilating it to God (and this is the static aspect) and it perfects the activity of the soul through the infused theological and moral virtues which flow from grace (and this is the dynamic aspect). Chardon is interested principally in the practical or dynamic aspect of grace.

In his emphasis on the separating effect of grace, Chardon re-echoes the teaching of Tauler and St. John of the Cross. The more God fills us with His grace or the more we are assimilated to God through grace, the more we are alienated from all that is not God. Chardon maintains that since Adam there has been no truly perfect man but Christ and that souls are more perfect as they approach Christ more closely.

However, Chardon is not so pre-occupied with the practical aspects of grace that he neglects the presence of the Trinity in the soul through grace. Like St. Thomas, he insists that the Trinity dwells in the soul through the gift of sanctifying grace, which doctrine is in conformity with the teaching of the Carmelites of Salamanca, Billuart, Suárez, and Froget. He criticized the doctrine of Vásquez, who

Introduction

considered the indwelling as a simple extension of God's presence of immensity and he uses the selfsame arguments of Suárez to show the distinction between the presence of immensity and the divine indwelling. However, Chardon is not Suarezian in his teaching, but follows the doctrine of John of St. Thomas.

The divine indwelling and the invisible missions constitute a formal and essential element of spiritual progress. Perhaps Chardon is the first spiritual writer to speak of the divine missions as applied to growth in sanctity and of the Persons of the Trinity as principles of activity in the soul of the just. Since the divine indwelling is effected through the reception of sanctifying grace and since one of the necessary effects of grace is the cross, Chardon demonstrates in the third section of his work, where he treats of the divine indwelling and invisible missions, that even considered as a participation in the divine life, grace leads to the cross. The spiritual desolations described in the second section of the work separate the soul from all that is not God and thus prepare a place for the invisible missions. On the other hand, spiritual consolations, which in this life are a prelude to heaven and a cause of fervor, may readily become occasions for selfish joy, laxity, inconstancy, or presumption. To forestall such dangers and also to dispose for further invisible missions, Chardon advises the soul of the necessity of purifying the intention, of cultivating poverty of spirit, and of purging the memory, intellect, and will. The final effect of spiritual desolations will be the purification of love itself so that love through activity will give way to love in quietude and repose, which is the prelude to the transforming union. The soul then sweetly rests in God.

CONCLUSION

Although Chardon's insistence on the negative elements of the spiritual life-suffering, mortification, and the separating power of love-may lead some readers to consider him more of a Carmelite than a Dominican in his spiritual doctrine, he is nevertheless thoroughly Thomistic and his doctrine is in full accord with the traditional theology of the spiritual life. For example, he is faithful to the teaching that all souls are obliged to strive for ever greater perfection and that the full perfection of charity in this life is nothing more than the normal growth and development of grace and the virtues and gifts. He does not believe that there are certain extraordinary degrees of grace reserved for a few chosen souls, although he admits, with St. John of the Cross, that they are few who reach the perfection of charity in this life. Those who do not attain to the full flowering of grace have most likely placed obstacles to grace or have in one way or another retarded their own progress.

As has already been mentioned, we do not find in Chardon the division of the spiritual life into the three stages or ways which has been in vogue since the seventeenth century, although the threefold division was also used by St. Thomas and other earlier theologians. Chardon prefers to speak of the spiritual life in terms of the negative aspect of suffering and purgation and the positive aspect of growth in grace and the invisible missions. He does, however, speak of three grades of contemplative prayer or contemplative love which range from the lower degrees of contemplation to the transforming union.

Chardon seems to allow for an acquired contemplation which is the result of the soul's perfect exercise of faith and charity. Perhaps he was familiar with the earlier Carmelite teaching on this point, which held for the necessity of some kind of transition between the higher grades of mental prayer and the first degree of infused contemplation.

In his treatment of holy abandonment Chardon will remind the reader of the teachings of Father de Caussade, S.J., and St. Therese of Lisieux. At the summit of sanctity, he says, the soul finds utmost calm, sublime peace, and unbroken silence, though at this period the soul will have a greater inclination for suffering than for consolation. He avoids the heresy of Quietism by making a careful distinction between the act of pure love and the state of pure love.

Chardon has some interesting and perhaps original observations on the famous comparison between Martha and Mary. Martha is usually considered to be inferior to Mary both in perfection and in her state of life. Chardon maintains that such is not the case. Martha did not love Jesus less than Mary did, but Mary is more loved by Jesus, and this is true not because she was more caressed, but because she was more severely tried by suffering.

Some may observe an apparent omission in *The Cross of Jesus*—Chardon does not treat explicitly of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. At first glance this would seem to be a serious error in a Dominican theologian, since the Thomistic doctrine on the spiritual life makes the operation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost a *sine qua non* for the mystical act and the mystical state. However, the lacuna is only apparent, for the doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Ghost is implied in Chardon's treatment of the higher stages of the spiritual life. For both Chardon and St. John of the

Cross there was less need to treat explicitly of the gifts, since they were emphasizing the negative aspect of growth in sanctity.¹⁴

The Cross of Jesus was written for the encouragement and inspiration of holy souls who are generously striving for sanctity. Its doctrine is austere and may even prove frightening to the timid and the self-centered. But for those souls who are capable of loving to the point of sacrifice, for those who are earnestly striving to alienate themselves from the things of earth and to give themselves completely to the things of God, this book will be a joyful summons to suffering and the cross. And such souls will heed that summons with grateful hearts, for they know full well that where they find the cross, they will also find the good Jesus.

JORDAN AUMANN, O.P.

14 Cf. Jacques Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, Part II, chap. 13.

Contents &

							P.	AGE		
Int	RODUCTION	٠	•	•	•	•	•	v		
	PART ONE									
	THE GRACE OF J.	ESU	IS							
CHAPTER										
1	JESUS, THE SOURCE OF GRACE .	٠	•			٠	٠	3		
2	THE GRACE OF CHRIST	٠	٠	٠				9		
3	THE MYSTICAL BODY	•		٠	٠			15		
4	Members of the Mystical Body							21		
5	CHRIST'S VOCATION TO THE CROSS							27		
6	CHRIST YEARNS FOR THE CROSS .			•				32		
7	The Shadow of the Cross					٠	٠	37		
8	CHRIST'S PREOCCUPATION WITH DEA	ATH						42		
9	THE SORROW OF CHRIST		٠	٠	٠		٠	49		
10	CHRIST'S WILL TO DIE	•	•	•	•		•	53		
11	THE CHARITY OF CHRIST						٠	58		
12	Love's Delay	•	•	•	•	•	•	64		

	xxiv						Contents				
13	Love's Generosity .				٠				•		70
14	No Greater Love .	٠		•				٠	٠		76
15	Love's Abandonment		•	٠	•	٠		•	•		81
16	THE ETERNAL CROSS .		٠								87
17	THE CROSS AND THE MY	STIC	AL	Bor	ΟY	•	0	٠			91
18	Interior Crosses										96
19	Love's Detachment .	٠									101
20	DEATH THROUGH LOVE	٠								٠	107
21	Love Rejected							٠			113
22	Love's Annihilation .	٠		•							119
23	ORPHANS THROUGH LOV	'E				٠	٠				124
24	THE MOTHER OF GOD	٠	٠	•		٠					131
25	Mary's Cross						٠				141
26	A Cross for Her Son				٠	•					146
27	VALIANT WOMAN		•				٠				154
28	Cause of Mary's Suffer	RING		•	٠		٠				165
29	At the Foot of the C	ROSS			٠	٠					173
30	LONELY MOTHER			•	•		•			۰	189
	PAF	2T	ти	0							
S	PIRITUAL CONSOLAT				VD	DE	SO	LA	TIC	DΛ	S
31	THE DELIGHTS OF HOLY	Lo	VE		•		٠		٠		195
32	CONTEMPLATION A SOUR	CE (OF .	Con	ISOL	ATI	ON	٠			204
33	MEDITATION ON GOD'S P	ERFE	CTI	ONS		•					212
34	EFFECTS OF SPIRITUAL C	ONS	OLA	TIO	N						218

	Contents							xx	,	
35	ECSTASY OF HOLY LOVE .	•		•			•			224
36	THE OPERATIONS OF HOLY	Lov	E		•	•				229
37	THE SACRAMENT OF LOVE	٠		•				•		235
38	TRANSFORMATION THROUGH	Lo	VE							240
39	HOLY LOVE SURPASSES KNOW	LEI	OGE		4					247
40	Spiritual Crosses									255
41	ARIDITY OF SPIRIT									260
42	TIMIDITY AND SCRUPULOSITY							٠		264
43	DESOLATION OF SPIRIT .	•								269
44	REBELLION OF NATURE .									274
45	ABANDONMENT BY GOD .									280
46	Suspension of Self-knowlei	OGE								292
47	JOB, A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL	SUF	FER	ING						296
48	THE DIVINE PLAN IN SPIRITU	AL S	SUF	FER	ING				•	299



The Grace of Jesus

AK



CHAPTER 1 K

Jesus, the Source of Grace

GOD never had any intention of setting a limit to the exaltation of man, for His gifts to man are not measured by man's merit but by the richness of the divine Benefactor. Everything that the love of the Creator is capable of doing and which bursts upon man as an indication of His grandeur, prompts us to adore God. We may question the wisdom of what He does, but not His goodness.

It is a strange paradox that One who has been offended should make satisfaction for His offender; that one who has despised the commands of his sovereign should be treated with honor and respect—once he has been absolved—while an innocent One is punished for a sin He has not committed; that God's only Son, Himself sinless, should suffer the torments which another had justly merited by his sins. It is seemingly a serious charge against God's wisdom that He should become man, that being eternal He should become subject to time, and that being immutable He should obey the laws of the changing seasons.

It is a paradox that God should take on human existence, that the infinite should be added to, and that immensity should be contained in a tiny body. It is the prodigy of the ages that He who is equal to the Father should become His inferior in a stranger's womb and that the sovereign Judge of men, who is the source of life, should be condemned to death by them. It is incomprehensible that two abysses, one of wealth and the other of poverty, should be united in the one subject and that while He pours out His abundance upon creatures for their betterment, He Himself languishes in poverty and, shorn of honor, is crushed beneath the grievous burden of God's just anger.

Through an extraordinary and wholly unexpected dispensation, man becomes rich as God spends Himself. In taking upon Himself our lowliness and becoming "unequal to God," He raises human nature to a grandeur that is proper to infinity. He trades the death which He borrows from it for the life which He gives to it. He snatches human nature from the laws of time that it might reign in eternal freedom; He divests it of the rags of mortal life that it might be sovereignly adored in the divinity where it is gloriously united to God through the hypostatic union.

This admirable transaction was effected in the union which the Word contracted with human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. Two natures, one divine and the other human, were intimately joined together without either one being altered in its essentials or destructive of the other. Thus, the divine Person of the Word receives in the assumed human nature the same honors which are His in the divine nature which the Father communicates to Him by an eternal generation. Mary conceives and brings forth the same Son whom the Father begets from all eternity by the ineffable operation of His intellect.

This mysterious union of the Incarnation is modeled on the union of the Trinity wherein the three distinct Persons are one God, simple in nature and indivisible in substance. It is also the prototype and efficient cause of a third unity wherein many persons under the one head constitute the mystical body of Christ. St. Paul refers to this sublime teaching when he says that the saints are the body of Jesus and members under the one Head who is a source of life in them.

Three subsistences—essential, personal, and mystical can be distinguished in Jesus and from them proceed three types of union. The first two, the essential and the personal subsistence, are attributed to God. The essential subsistence is absolute and the personal subsistence is relative. The former can be communicated to either of the other Persons but the latter is incommunicable. Thus, the Father communicates to the Son His very nature, life, intellect and will, and all His other incomprehensible perfections except those personal properties which the Son knows and loves in the Father as another Person distinct from Himself and from the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the properties which distinguish the Person of the Son are personal and cannot be communicated to the Holy Spirit nor attributed to the Father, and although the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and receives from them jointly whatever the Son receives from the Father, He is nevertheless neither the one nor the other nor the two of them together. Nevertheless, He is one and the same substance with the Father and the Son, one and the same nature, one and the same God.

The essential subsistence which is common to the three ineffable Persons of the Trinity is such that the divine nature which the Father communicates to the Son is no more proper to Himself than it is to the Son, and the Holy Spirit receives it from Them both with the same

consubstantiality. The very essence of divinity is that it be the same self-subsistent being. When God said to Moses, "I am He who is," it is as if had said: "I am an infinite ocean of substance, an immense sea of existence, an eternal abyss of subsistence. What differentiates Me from all other beings is the fact that I am of Myself and self-subsistent."

The personal properties are the principles of distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but they are not the principles of the existence and subsistence of their common nature. On the contrary, it is from that nature or substance, as from an infinite and fundamental source, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit derive their subsistence. God's essential subsistence is, as it were, modified by the personal properties of each divine Person. Thus, the Father is not produced but begets, the Son is begotten and produces, and the Holy Spirit is passively spirated or produced but does not beget. I have said that the divine subsistence or nature is the radical and fundamental source of the distinction of the divine Persons. I dared not say that it is the principle of their personal subsistence, because what belongs to the very nature of God is above active or passive production.

It pleased God in the fullness of time to form another unity which is patterned after this inscrutable essential unity when in the mystery of the Incarnation He joined two natures, infinitely distant from one another, in the indivisible Person of His Son. The one divine Person performs all the operations of the divine and human natures so that everything that is natural to Jesus, the Son of Mary—His human birth and its consequences, His death and its circumstances, His burial, resurrection, ascension, etc.—is properly attributed to the Son of God. Thus, Christ's hunger, thirst, fatigue, and other sufferings were proper to

a corruptible nature and oblige us to exercise our faith in Him whom we adore as God. On the other hand Jesus, the Son of Mary, does everything that calls for our love as only-begotten Son, for He is God and Son of God and as such He forgives sins, performs miracles, institutes the sacraments, and remains forever the object of homage and adoration for creatures who are capable of these acts.

Thus we do not divide Christ, for we do not separate these two lives, one divine and the other human, from their subject. Nor do we separate their diverse operations by holding for a diversity of principles in Christ, for in Him there is only the one principle. We do not make any distinction between Jesus, the Son of Mary, and Jesus, the Son of God. The angel, instructed in the school of the Trinity, announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear the Son who had been begotten through all eternity by the Father and that she would be His Mother.

This uncreated subsistence of the divine Person, in which the two natures are united in the mystery of the Incarnation, is the basis on which the marvelous unity of Christianity rests. For Jesus wished to establish a distinct unity in the Church of which He is the Head. He Himself would be the mystical supposit and subsistence of an assembly of the faithful who are joined together by grace as members of one body. Grace is a sublime participation of the divine nature; it resides in Jesus Christ as its source and flows from Him to souls, as the vigor of the physical body proceeds from the head and is communicated to each of the members. Christ pours forth grace and charity into souls, mutually uniting them to form one body with Him who is the Head; He gives them a subsistence which is not human but divine, not natural but mystical. As if this were not enough, He infuses His divine Spirit into the

whole body and each member so that they become not so much His members as one and the same thing by participation. What is more, they become in a mystical sense one and the same person, the one and the same Jesus Christ by participation.

CHAPTER 2 K

The Grace of Christ

THE intimate union with Christ through grace filled the saints with joy. St. Paul frequently referred to it in his epistles and it found universal expression in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. So generally and constantly was it believed by the faithful that it has only to be stated and it teaches us how we are united to Jesus Christ.

We have seen how in the mystery of the hypostatic union the Son of the living God elevated a human nature to the surpassing grandeur, not of an adoptive, but of a natural divine sonship. In the human nature which He took from the sacred womb of Mary, the Word performs the functions of the human person, with the result that the sacred humanity is a quasi-universal principle of all the graces to be communicated to men and angels. Grace was given to the soul of Christ in a plenitude which befitted the dignity of the Person to whom His human nature was substantially united and to whom this grace was proportioned as its end and principle.

The necessary relation between grace and the divine Person in whom it subsists and the assumed human nature which it perfects may be considered from the aspect of a disposition to the hypostatic union, as something essential to this adorable union, or as something which flows from this mystery of the hypostatic union.

As regards the first, the last degree of heat which immediately precedes actual ignition of a material perfectly disposed to burst into flame has some affinity to the fire which ignites the material. So also, since the union of the divine Person with human nature is infinite, the grace which disposed the created nature for uncreated grace had to have a kind of infinity in order to dispose that human nature for union with the divine Person. This antecedent disposition was not required by any physical necessity, but by reason of a moral fitness which was an effect or a result of this ineffable union.

Because of its union with the divine Word, the soul of Christ received the plenitude of grace and an infinite dignity. The grace, charity, and other perfections lavished upon the assumed human nature take on the immense grandeur of the Word to which that humanity is united. The divine nature was not made or created in Christ because the divine nature is neither the principle nor term of production. Neither was the Person made or created, though it is eternally begotten. What was made in Christ were His soul and body, His virtues, grace, and glory, though everything that was made in Him subsists and exists in His divine Person. If the acts of religion, obedience, humility, and the other virtues imperated by His charity were infinite actions, both because they involve a divine Person whom they rendered submissive to God and because they proceeded from an infinite Person through the infused virtues which were united to that Person in the hypostatic union, it follows that grace, which is the principle of charity and of all the supernatural virtues, subsisted in the Person of the Word.

To present this idea more clearly, we may say that the measure of a thing's perfection flows from its relation to its end. Now grace and charity have for their end the union of the soul with God. But the most intimate of all possible unions with God is that union of a created human nature with a divine nature in the unity of the divine Person. The soul of Christ must therefore possess grace in a plenitude which is proportionate to the loftiness of the hypostatic union. It is a source which no creatures, though their number be multiplied to infinity, can ever exhaust.

I dared to say that God was pleased to infuse into the adorable soul of Jesus a sanctity that was not accommodated to the capacity of a created person but proportioned to the dignity of a divine Person. Consequently, when we are justified, ours is a Christian justification and not a justification similar to that possessed by Adam before he sinned, for his justification was proper to the father and head of the human race, to be handed on to others after him. It was, of course, a supernatural justification, a marvelous sharing of the divine nature, but it was, as it were, adapted to the human nature in which it was received and whose inclinations it served to regulate. But the grace which God uses for our reparation and justification is not proportioned either to the condition of human nature or to the capacity of the created person in whom it is received. It is the grace which was communicated to Christ's human nature by a divine Person who invested it with His own infinite excellence so far as this can be done.

By this grace we belong to God, become saints, and enter into the glory of supernatural and divine sonship. By it, in Christ, we become and are recognized as God's children; by it we have the privilege of being received by Him, as the branch is received by the tree on which it is

ingrafted. For this reason St. James spoke of Christ as "the ingrafted Word which is able to save your souls." ¹

Jesus is one with His Father in the unity of the divine essence and communication of nature, but not in the unity of Person. Thanks to the grace He deigns to give us, we enjoy a participation in the same divine nature which He enjoys with His Father and the Holy Spirit. We are one substance with Him and although it surpasses all comprehension, He and we form together the one mystical Christ. He expressed the first truth when He asked the Father to give us the same splendor of glory that He receives from the Father in His eternal procession, so that we might all be united with Him in the one nature which is common to the adorable Persons of the glorious Trinity. That the splendor of which He spoke refers to the divine nature is proved by the words He had formerly spoken when He asked the Father for the same splendor that He enjoyed before the creation of the world.2

As to the second truth, the Apostle desires that we become by adoption what Jesus is by nature.³ The Father sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, making us speak to Him with the confidence of children addressing their fathers. From this point on we shall not be treated with indifference, as if we were mere servants, but as children in the state of liberty, with a right to the parental blessing.

The divine Spirit renders testimony to our spirit that the miserable condition of a slave is replaced by the blessed dignity of children of God. Thus, Jesus said to Nicodemus: "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." 4 On this basis, what is born of God will likewise be God, because the divine generation resides in him who has a birth of this sort. Now in God there is but

¹ Jas. 1:21.

⁸ Gal. 4:6.

² John 17:22; 17:5.

⁴ John 3:6.

one generation, that of the only Son, but when generation is communicated to us by grace, it incorporates us in Him in a mystical unity of the spirit which makes us children of God.

St. Paul stripped himself of everything that the world esteems and considered the whole world as less than dust and ashes in order that he might be united with Christ, not by a justification coming from the law nor by a sanctity adapted to human nature, but by a justification which proceeds from the Person of the uncreated Word through His sacred humanity.⁵

Happy the man who brings all his life and love to this inexhaustible source of grace which makes lesus the fountain of happiness for men and angels. How fortunate the man who has emptied himself of all that holds most men in such slavery that its price should be tears of blood. Lost to all created things, even to himself, he rests on the bosom of Christ whence flow living waters which are capable of quenching the thirst which creatures could never assuage. What a joy to be aware of being united to Christ by the grace and charity which make His soul worthy, by a consequent dignity, of the most adorable union to which God's omnipotence can attain externally by its loving communications. There is no greater nobility in heaven or on earth than to be raised to the supernatural order where one may form with all the faithful, by an ineffable union of grace, the mystical Christ. To this end, Christ Himself is the mystical subsistence of His beloved Church, verifying what St. John said of the sacred humanity: "All that was made in Him, is life." 6

Sanctifying grace is the source of our justification and perfection and in the holy soul of Jesus it acquired a moral infinitude because it subsists in the Second Person of the

most glorious Trinity. However, it does not make of its subject an adopted son because adoptive sonship occurs only where natural sonship is lacking. A human subsistence dares not appear in the presence of a divine subsistence when the two natures are united in the Incarnation, because in that mystery the divine Person terminates both natures. Similarly, the habitual grace of the Head of the mystical body does not produce its proper effect of the adoption which is reserved for men and angels. By sharing in the grace of Christ, we are united to the natural Son so that our adoption may resemble its exemplar as much as possible.

Grace has two particular features in the soul of Christ: it subsists in the divine person and it is adoptive, that is, it effects our adoption. As subsistent, it is infinite in its own proper order; as adoptive, it is communicated according to the measure of its recipients. As subsistent, it has to do with natural filiation; as adoptive, it gives us an imitation of the unique divine filiation. As subsistent, it surpasses the capacity of men and of angels; as adoptive, it is proportioned to the nature it perfects and yet elevates it so that it may enter into union with the Son of God. In Him it is the source whence He distributes to each soul according to the measure determined in the eternal plan of predestination.

The grace which is the principle of adoption in us is the same grace which, in its plenitude, subsists in Christ, in the Person of the Word. Thus it is clear that through grace Jesus is the subsistence of the mystical body. Thus, too, we see that we are united to Him by the bonds of the grace that flows from Him as Head. With Him we form the one mystical Christ.

CHAPTER 3 K

The Mystical Body

WHEN Jacob donned the clothing of his elder brother Esau, he did not thereby assume his ways, condition, or person. Therefore Isaac asked him: "Who are you?" Such is not the case with us, who by baptism have put off the garments of the old Adam and are clothed with Christ.¹ In baptism our miserable condition of slavery is destroyed and, as St. Paul says, changed into that of sons. The Father no longer asks us who we are, for we have the honor of being clothed with Christ, and it is His Spirit which cries in our hearts: "Abba, Father." ²

There are many reasons for our being ravished with divine delight at the word "Father." The word admirably expresses our happy condition. Let it be a sweet and a loving cry. The living Father says to the Son within His bosom: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." The Son replies in that same bosom: "Abba, Father." The Spirit is sent into the womb of the Virgin Mary and from the new nature which the Son there assumes, He cries "Abba, Father" to Him who is His principle of generation in time and eternity. Finally, the Son is infused into our hearts through grace and there He raises the same voice, as the Spirit of our spirit, He does not cry for Himself,

1 Gal. 3:27.

but for us and in us, as if He and we formed one mystical person. It is He who cries out and prays, and who, consequently, is in us the principle of all our supernatural activity.

Philosophy and revelation teach us that the actions and passions of the head and the members are attributed to the person. I write with my hand, speak with my tongue, form pictures in my imagination, and suffer with my body, but it is my person that produces all these works. Absolutely speaking, the life of Jesus is not ours by a natural right but by reason of the grace which unites us to Him like members of a body to a head. His life becomes ours, His Spirit is the Spirit of our spirit, and His merits become ours. He hungers and thirsts with us and takes our other miseries upon Himself. We are clothed with His glory.

We also learn that He does not manifest all the joy, all the perfections, and all the submission He owes to His Father as long as we do not exercise charity and the other virtues in an eminent way or as long as our spirit is slow to acquire that perfect detachment which terminates in complete negation of self for the glory of the Creator. "And when all things are made subject to Him . . . that God may be all in all." 3 This is not true of Christ in His own soul and body, but of Christ as Head of the mystical body. He said as much to the first and most important members of that body when He told them that He would not drink the fruit of the vine until He drank it new with them in the kingdom of His Father. Jesus wished to say to His apostles: "I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in the beatific love which is the kingdom of My Father."

Our Lord complained of Paul's persecution of Christians

⁸ I Cor. 15:28.

as being an injury done to His own person.⁴ Moreover, He had previously stated that He suffers hunger and thirst in those who suffer the needs of food and drink and that He feels the weakness of the ill, the horrors of prison, and the tortures of the martyrs along with the saints who suffer these things. This made St. Paul cry out boldly in the name of the Church: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me," ⁵ as if to make us understand that his entire life and the actions which are the signs of his life belong to Jesus who, in the order of grace, is the subsistence of the mystical body. "Do you seek a proof of Christ who speaks in me?" ⁶

In this sense Jesus is born in us; He grows and becomes strong in us and finally reaches perfection in us. Thus, St. Paul filled up in his flesh, for the Church, what was lacking to the sufferings of Christ.7 As far as Jesus is concerned, nothing necessary for our salvation was lacking. God's justice exacted ample satisfaction from Christ, causing Him to undergo sufferings far beyond the endurance of human nature but commensurate with the strength of the divine Person to which it was united. But although nothing is lacking to the sufferings of Jesus as Head of the Church, something is lacking to them on the part of the members of the body of the Church, and it is as part of this body that St. Paul fills up in his flesh what is lacking to Christ's sufferings. And yet, it was not so much Paul who effected this in the flesh of Paul, but Jesus. Thus, Jesus is always at work in the faithful, bringing to perfection what remains to be realized for the perfection of His mystical body.

We conclude, then, that the supernatural acts and sufferings of holy souls are not so properly theirs that they

⁴ Acts 9:4-5.

⁶ II Cor. 13:3.

⁵ Gal. 2:20.

⁷ Col. 1:24; Eph. 1:22-23.

cannot be appropriated also to Jesus Christ, living and subsisting in them as Head of the mystical body which they compose with Him. If they can say with St. Paul that they live more the life of Jesus than their own when they fast, pray, humble themselves, or practice mortification, they can say that all their actions proceed from a principle which is a source of life in them. In and with them this principle produces those meritorious actions which give them the right to an eternal reward.

Because of the mystical life and subsistence of the Spirit of Jesus in our souls, we do not approach our Father in fear, as Jacob approached the bed of his aged father Isaac.8 It is not with a guilty conscience that we ask, in another's name, for the blessing, for the Spirit of truth bears witness to our spirit that we are the sons of God. We shall say with the Beloved Disciple: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that He has willed to give us grace through which we are called His well-beloved sons." It is much more than merely being considered sons, for in grace we possess a real quality which inheres in the essence of our souls. As St. Paul says: "He is no longer a slave, but a son." 9

We would never have dared dream of such a marvel nor have presumed on this favor which surpasses the understanding of angels and the hopes of men, had not the Author of grace drawn us powerfully to Himself. He draws us not only by a transport of will but even more by a change of our manner of living.

"No one has ascended into heaven except him who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven." ¹⁰ If Christ alone ascended to heaven, since He alone has descended from it, and if hope could envisage

⁸ Gen. 27:12.

⁹ Gal. 4:7.

¹⁰ John 3:13.

God only during this present life, Christians would be the most miserable of all men. Their faith would become sterile and the love that binds them to the Word made flesh would be reason for a despair which would forever cut them off from Him. But the word of God cannot deceive: the faithful for whom this sublime word was spoken cannot be deprived of that which makes them blessed in this life. They will not be frustrated in their hope for that good of which they have received a pledge in baptism. He who has descended from heaven ascends into heaven: He would never have come upon earth unless He had intended to return to heaven to make it accessible to the faithful. They do not enter Heaven as parts of a body that is separated from the Son of Man who is in heaven; they enter it united to Him by a bond similar to the tie which binds the parts to the head that all make up the complete body. Moreover, in this body they are, through grace, one mystical person, as St. Paul has so boldly said.11 He descended from heaven alone, but He does not return to it alone. He came down once but returns to it daily and at every hour with the saints who comprise His mystical body.

To the great Apostle this means that the Eternal Father has not only subjected all creatures, visible and invisible, to His Son, but that He has made Him Head of the Church which is His body and His fulfillment.¹² We are members of this body. We are the body of this Head. He gives us a share in His divine being, an imitation of His uncreated sonship. God has made Christ the Head of the whole Church, and He presides over it, governs, and controls it as a sovereign might rule and command a political body. Christ also animates this body, for He is the principle of its supernatural life and of a divine order to which He

¹¹ I Cor. 12:27.

elevates it in a marvelous fashion. His nature is the same as that of His members, into whom He instills courage, energy, sufficiency, and joy. In a word, He is all in all, and He heaps upon it divine favors and blessings.

Thus, we see that we do not form a merely political body with Christ, like citizens of a republic under the authority of a single ruler with whom we are only extrinsically united; that requires only a mutual harmony of judgment and a desire for the common good. Rather, through grace we form with Christ a body modelled on a natural living body. As Head of this body, Jesus vivifies all who are His members and by the intimate and ineffable bonds of the grace which He pours forth in our souls, He communicates His mystical subsistence to the whole composite.

CHAPTER 4 K

Members of the Mystical Body

IN the mysterious union of a divine and a human nature in one person, Christ joins in Himself two peoples, the Jew and the Gentile. He makes of them one vanquished people, one holy nation, one race chosen and predestined, and a royal priesthood. In both peoples there is a multitude of men, different in rank, poles apart in customs, separated by birth, and living centuries apart. All of them have been struck down by original sin in the battle fought by Satan against our first parents. But it has pleased God to raise up certain men whom He unites to Himself in the embrace of grace and makes them sharers of His divine being.

The streams and rivers that flow into the sea lose their names and identities to assume the name, properties, and very existence of the sea. Instead of their waters being confined by narrow banks as heretofore, they are lost in the vast and broad ocean which represents better than any created thing the immensity of the Creator. In like manner, the faithful naturally differ in nationality, temperament, and sex, but once they become members of the

mystical body and share through grace in the divine nature, they begin in a wonderful manner to imitate the grandeur of their Head. As His members they reflect the image of Him who is the principal member and with them forms one body. In this mystical body a serf will be paired with a king and the inequality between commoner and noble disappears. Rich and poor draw from the same treasury and Greek and Jew have the same heritage. The cultured have no advantage over the unlettered and there is no distinction of sex. The servant is no less esteemed than the master, for all are united to form one body which belongs to Christ.¹ All are His members and all live one life in Him. They are incorporated in Christ in such a way that they form one Christ. Everything that belongs to Him as Head is likewise theirs as members of His mystical body.

The first Christians tried to represent this wonderful union by the agape or love-banquet. At these banquets the poor sat with the rich and servants ate at table with their masters, signifying the unity that they enjoyed through the reception of the Eucharist. Doubtless it was this unity which the invincible martyr Gallicanus wished to imitate. He belonged to one of the most illustrious Roman senatorial families and his courage, prudence, and intellectual genius had won for him the favor of the emperor Constantine. But for the love of Christ he scorned the honors which most men would have welcomed and retired to a place near Ostia where he devoted himself to the service of pilgrims and the sick. Such a conversion had never before been known and the curiosity of the whole empire was aroused on seeing this famous man prostrate before the poor, kissing and washing their feet with his tears. He

¹ Gal. 3:28.

served at table with unusual solicitude and angelic modesty and tenderly cared for all the needs of the sick.

No less glorious is the example of St. Louis, who performed all the duties of charity toward the poor that Gallicanus did, but now the scene was a royal palace instead of a hospice. As the poor departed he would embrace them and give them the kiss of peace as if they were his own brothers. At times he would satisfy his hunger with the leavings of the dinner which he had just served to the poor. He was often seen going about his army camp in disguise, looking for the bodies of soldiers who had succumbed to the frightful ravages of the plague. These he buried with his royal hands, thus giving them a burial an ambitious worldly monarch might have envied. He felt impelled to do this by reason of that great charity which ignores all distinction between subject and king or master and servant because all are members of one Head.

If only these examples would open the eyes of the mighty ones of this world. Too often men attach excessive importance to titles and degrees, thinking that these will show how great they are and that others will be impressed by them. They are not interested in another title which they possess through the grace of Christ, which raises them up above all created things and is incomparably preferable to any earthly honor. On earth they may indeed be heads over other men. They may have the authority to command men in God's name and demand of their subjects a conscientious obedience rather than an obedience based on fear. But they should realize that if they do not outstrip their subjects in holiness as well as in authority, they will merit less glory than they should from their imitation of Him who is their Head; indeed, they may even be cut off,

like men rejected. Man's natural body has many members, and although some of them are less noble than others, together they form a single composite. Christ our Head has many faithful members who depend upon Him and make up a single Church, although they are not alike in natural gifts, fortune, and grace. It is necessary that we make this distinction, for if all the members were alike, where would be the beauty of the organized body which the variety of

parts makes possible?

On this subject St. Paul outdoes himself. He gave the matter much thought in order to clarify his ideas. In the natural body the members are solicitous to serve each other mutually. The eye cannot say to the hand that it has no need of its work, nor to the feet that it can get along without them.2 Similarly in the mystical body, all the members must suffer when a single member suffers, "that there may be no schism" 3 in this body. It would not be right if one part of the Church were to suffer persecution while other parts, like detached members, refuse to take part in the sufferings of the rest of the body by extending that compassion which justice and charity demand. In His plan to establish a perfect union among all, God wished all to be baptized in one and the same Spirit and that slaves and free men should draw their grace from the same source.4 He makes them sit down at the same table and gives them the same food and drink, His Body and Blood, so that they will be one. The body is a union of many members, and the less noble are parts of it as truly as the most perfect.

Let superiors and directors of souls take into consideration the way in which various souls pertain to Christ. Imagine the loving devotion with which Jesus' Mother

² I Cor. 12:21.

⁸ I Cor. 12:25.

⁴ I Cor. 12:13.

handled the body of her Child when she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and performed all the other services demanded by the helplessness to which His love for us had reduced Him. Who could think, then, that the members of His mystical body are of little value? He holds them more dear than those of His natural body, which for love of them He abandoned to the rigors of death, allowing them to be handled with an irreverence ill-suited to their sacredness. Those whom Satan's rage and envy had stirred up against the only-begotten Son of the Father approached His sacred body with a ferocity which arouses horror and pity in the hearts of His friends.

Similarly, superiors sometimes overlook the importance which their subjects have under their adorable Head and do not reflect that their commands are supposed to increase and perfect the mystical Christ. Conscious of their own authority, they forget that they have not been made superiors so that they can confound or crush others, but to lift them up, to elevate them to a condition which is above nature and belongs to a divine order. Let them ponder over the fact that power in the Church is not armed with a sword 5 but with charity. Authority transformed by charity will have no other inclination than that which charity gives it, no other properties but those which St. Paul assigns to charity,6 no other goal but that of charity itself. Those who hold positions of authority will therefore consider themselves, in relation to their subjects, only in the light of that equality through charity which they enjoy in union with Christ. As their Head He has treated His mystical members with a most tender love and has reserved the most profound sufferings for Himself. He is therefore called the Good Shepherd because His power

⁵ Luke 25:26.

is used chiefly to lift from other shoulders the yokes which in His mercy He would bear in their place. Only the hireling or the false shepherd strikes, kills, and destroys. Thus, when St. Paul spoke to the faithful it was always with much respect and love: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God," or: "by the charity of the Holy Ghost," or on another occasion, "I adjure you by the mildness and modesty of Christ." or

St. Catherine of Siena once spoke to her confessor about extraordinary graces being understandable only in the light of the mystical body. But Catherine's director had not as yet personally experienced the extraordinary effects which this truth produces in the souls of saints and was inclined to doubt the perfection of his penitent. A divine illumination, which enabled Catherine to penetrate the secret thoughts of men, made her aware of his doubt and she turned the matter over to her beloved Spouse. Suddenly her face was transfigured into that of a man of about thirty years of age, a face so beautiful that it cast all earthly beauty into the shade. The director was astounded and cried out: "What is this that I see? Who is it that speaks to me?" He was even more astounded to hear a voice assure him: "It is He who is." Thus Catherine proved to him that it was Jesus who spoke in her, for she was more truly transformed into His life than her face had been transfigured into His image.

⁷ Rom. 12:1.

⁸ Rom. 15:30.

⁹ II Cor. 10:1.

CHAPTER 5 K

Christ's Vocation to the Cross

SINCE Christ's grace was aimed at effecting the most eminent union that God can bestow upon a creature, that grace cannot be exhausted by any created subject whether human or angelic. So great is its plenitude that it cannot be exhausted or in any way decreased by being communicated to others. But Christ was given grace also in view of His purpose in coming upon earth. The office He was to perform was the satisfaction which the Head was to make for His guilty members. The abundance of His grace, therefore, disposed His soul to obey the decree of the Trinity concerning the cross and all its concomitant sufferings whereby strict satisfaction was to be made.

Wise men teach, reason demands, and the Scriptures affirm that grace disposes a man for the work to which he is called. We shall understand, then, that as Head of the mystical body, Christ had an obligation to satisfy for His members. Strictly speaking, the Son of God had no obligation to satisfy for us either before or after the Incarnation. His charity and mercy alone prompted Him to become man, and as such He became the Redeemer of the world.

² Gen. 26:7-9.

He was offered because it was His own will. However, once he became man and assumed the position as Head of all who belong to Him by grace, He also assumed the obligation of satisfying for the members who had sinned. In like manner, the head of a physical body, although not suffering from an affliction, is concerned with the healing of other parts of the body. The same thing is true where royalty is concerned: those who govern others feel that they must make compensation for any injustices which their subjects commit against their neighbors and by so acting they follow no other law than what their position of authority demands.

For this reason, Christ as Head of the Church has a twofold office: to join to Himself all who share in His holiness and to satisfy on their behalf the strict justice of God. All four of the evangelists point out that Christ's kingship was the one and only cause of His death. Knowing well that this was the reason for His death, Jesus made no attempt to hide or deny His kingship but, breaking His silence which had so surprised the procurator, He answered that He was indeed a king.

When Isaac entered the town of Gerar in Palestine he was afraid of being murdered because of his beautiful wife Rebecca. He therefore told the people of that land that she was his sister and said nothing about her being his wife.² So successful was this ruse that he smiled at having so perfectly dissimulated her status. But Isaac's love is as ice in comparison with that of Christ. Fearful for his life, Isaac stepped down from his role as husband; Christ so

¹ St. Mark: "And the inscription of His cause was . . . King"; St. Matthew: "This is Jesus the King"; St. Luke: "This is the King"; St. John: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King."

loved the Church that He voluntarily delivered Himself to die for her, because He was her Head, her King, and her Spouse. Throughout His whole life and even when dying, He made public profession of the office He had exercised. "Then did I pay that which I took not away." Making a bath of His blood, He bathed His spouse in it to wash away her stains and blemishes. He thereby endowed her with a beauty proper to His goodness and made of her an object of His loving delight.

It is easy to see from this that the fullness of grace in Christ's adorable soul had two distinct effects. On the one hand, His grace could not increase, since it was proportioned to the infinite Person united to His human nature. It filled Him with glory, dispensed Him from being a wayfarer, and elevated Him to the happy state of a comprehensor. On the other hand, in constituting Him the Head of mankind, grace was a source of suffering and pain. Grace fits a man for the task to which he is called; therefore, the grace in Jesus' holy soul produced a weight which gravitated toward the end for which He came into the world so that by His sufferings and death on the cross He might satisfy for sin. Grace caused an outpouring of glory in the superior part of His soul, but at the same time caused a suspension of that glory in the inferior part. It was a principle of communication for Him, but it was also a source of privation; it was an inexhaustible source of consolation, but as long as He lived among men, it was a constant source of desolation.

Thus, at one and the same time grace was for Jesus a reason for rapture and an occasion of abasement, of enjoyment and of loss, of presence and of absence. Although it determined and directed Him to a vision of the divine

⁸ Ps. 68:5.

essence, its weight inclined to the cross and prevented Him from tasting the joy of the blessed, holding back for thirty-three years the natural overflow of glory to the inferior part of His soul.

O grace which unifies and detaches, consoles and afflicts! Grace which binds together at one and the same time the two extremes of happiness and unhappiness. Human wisdom will not have it that two contraries can co-exist in one and the same subject at the same time. But in Christ's soul, indivisible in its substance, an abyss of riches is conjoined to extreme poverty, without the one destroying the other. Thus grace brings together, in a bosom where grace is at home, two combatants which face one another in the soul of Christ as in an arena. One is measureless glory, a glory of plenitude, both as regards the perfect subject into which it has been received and as regards the realization of its own proper form. The other combatant is that weight or inclination to suffering, which formed in His soul a tendency or predisposition to death. Glory is the nobler of the two and it absorbs the superior part of the soul. But the other entrenches itself so solidly in the inferior part of the soul that it holds glory besieged, as it were, in its fortress and prevents it from reaching into the animal and sensitive faculties of Christ and his lower reason. While glory holds sway and ravishes the higher faculties with joys befitting the Son of God, this other inclination behaves like a tyrant and reduces the holy soul of Christ to the most rigorous servitude. Not the slightest overflow of glory or the faintest communication of blessed sweetness was allowed to refresh and console the inferior part of His soul.

For a brief moment this demanding inclination yielded to a loving dispensation of goodness so that they could enjoy a preview of glory, when the splendor of the Son of God was manifested in the body of Christ on Mt. Tabor.⁴ But even there the cruel grip was in no way relaxed, for instead of decreasing in strength, it made itself felt with more determination than before, supplanting those divine lights which made the transfiguration so glorious. A man's tongue can be a trustworthy witness to his feelings. On Mt. Tabor Jesus did not discuss the splendor of His body nor the delight of His soul, but the death that He would suffer in Jerusalem.⁵ He spoke not of the extremes of His joy but of His sufferings. Instead of His thoughts being flooded with torrents of divine joy, they were seized with the realization of the great sufferings which were to come.

⁴ Matt. 17.

⁵ Luke 9:31.

CHAPTER 6 &

Christ Yearns for the Cross

JESUS loved Peter, the chief of the apostles, with a tender but virile love. Yet despite all the protestations of loyalty uttered within Christ's hearing, Peter basely and cravenly denied Him the very evening of his First Communion.¹ Jesus stood before the highpriest surrounded by enemies who charged Him with the blackest imaginable crimes. He was accused of *lèse-majesté* against both God and man, of pretending to be God and usurping earthly power. His face was dishonered with blows, its beauty marred with spittle. He was unmercifully beaten, treated insolently, deafened by insistent voices which demanded His final ruin.

Ah, my Master, where now is Your heart? What are You thinking of now? Where does Your love transport You? Perhaps You are thinking of what You might say to defend Yourself against these unjust calumnies which arise more from envy and anger than from malice. Surely, You had enough to do to think of what concerned Yourself. Did not concern for Your own safety dispense You from solicitude for Your disciples? Yet Your love soared beyond all these obstacles and Your whole heart, Your eyes, Your living presence went out toward that unhappy apostle.

¹ Matt. 26:74.

You set aside the care that You could have taken to save Your own life in order to help one who was a traitor like Judas, for Peter, too, would have merited the damnation into which Judas cast himself by his final impenitence, had it not been for the grace of Your merciful glance. This was undeniable proof that You are more moved by those whom You love than by the thought of Your own life.

It is even more marvelous to consider Christ in the midst of glory on Mt. Tabor, plunged into the divine essence, absorbed in a fullness of eternal happiness which produced in both His inferior and superior faculties a flood of joy which is the rightful portion of one who is the only begotten and eternal Son of the Father. But instead of fixing His mind on that which transfigured even His garments, He drew back, as it were, and turned to look from afar at scourges, thorns, nails, and a cruel death upon a cross. He does violence not merely to ordinary gifts and consolations, not only to the joy experienced by those who have advanced far in the exercise of holy love, but also to the happiness which is a proper effect of His essential glory. Across such beatitude and amidst such divine pleasures, He gazes upon the cross and sighs for His passion. Draughts of eternal glory cannot quench His thirst for suffering.

It is here that we begin to grasp what St. Paul meant when he said that Christ chose the torment of the cross, regardless of the shame connected with it, even when beatific joy was offered to Him.² Set before Him were two extremes: one of glory, the other of confusion; a life of blessedness and one of shameful death; supreme happiness and supreme sorrow. The blessed life was already a reality, that of dishonor lay in the future, and the grace which acts as a weight drawing Him to pay the price of our

² Heb. 12:2.

ransom checks the consequences of that other extreme. Christ was not satisfied merely to banish all motives for joy and satisfaction and to accept in their place everything that could produce frightful sorrow, but calling upon His all-perfect omnipotence, He willed also that the eternal weight of glory should be suspended and not redound, as it normally would, to His lower nature. That lower nature would share in His glory during the transfiguration, when divine providence permitted a transitory overflow of glory, but even then that inclination retained its strength and customary vigor. Amid joys surpassing the understanding of creatures, it succeeded in fixing Jesus' heart and attention more on Calvary than upon Tabor.

Strange weight, which cannot be diverted by the floods of eternal glory. How extraordinary not to yield to that which charms God Himself. Fierce inclination, refusing to yield to omnipotent beauty. Heaven's caresses are oppressive to it and the rich outpouring of supreme goodness serves only to fix it more obstinately on its design. Though His glory overflowed in a transitory manner on Tabor, it was accompanied by the thought of the cross.

Alas, Divine Master, must your joy die even as it is born? Must your brief happiness be accompanied by a new sadness added to the old one which afflicts You so pitilessly? You pay for this fleeting joy with sorrows more intense than those You had ever experienced during the thirty years of Your hidden life, for to be deprived of a good which once gave joy is to feel the subsequent suffering more intensely.

After the transfiguration, when the inferior part of Christ's soul had savored that blessed rapture which hitherto it had not known, a distaste for this life mounted steadily in His soul. Until that moment His sensitive nature had been excluded from that blessed joy to which it had a right. We may think this unjust, were the plans of divine providence subject to our criticism, for what must we think of Christ's sorrows after He had enjoyed incomparable happiness?

When a young man is violently in love, any distractions from his beloved, whether they be honors, offers of position or anything else, serve but to give him pain. Music has no effect on him, nor the charming words of friends, and he cannot lose his sorrow in conviviality. If you think to divert his attention by showing him riches, by promising him position and power, or if you think to sweeten the tyranny under which he suffers, he will still count himself most miserable as long as he cannot satisfy the hopes aroused by his ardent love. He will look upon authority as tying him down and power as making him weak. Pleasure may cover him with the most delicate of caresses, but he will swear that it was his fate to be the most miserable person in the world. Earthly grandeur, instead of helping to put out the flames, will only make him desperate amidst the fires that consume him.

Does this not convey some idea of the impulse which grace produced in the soul of Christ? His love for the cross had such a hold upon His heart and soul that He disdained all riches, glory, or greatness other than those which He would derive from His beloved cross. Nor would the torrents of eternal glory which inundated His holy soul and its faculties extinguish this inclination.

Christ's beatific love did not overcome His love of the cross. The impetuous currents of divine pleasure could not extinguish the fiery ardor of His charity; rivers of the

living waters of glory could not stifle His overpowering inclination for suffering.⁸ It is therefore easy to conjecture that this weight could never be lightened by any motive of joy whether interior or exterior, natural or supernatural, human or angelic or divine. We need not be astonished, then, if in all situations, at all times, in all places, and in all the occupations of His earthly life, we can discern the effects which that disposition had upon His soul.

St. Luke records the interesting fact that Jesus was once preaching to a multitude of men and women of all ages and walks of life, so numerous that they trod one upon another. Unexpectedly, He interrupted His lengthy discourse to declare that He must be baptized in the baptism of His blood and that He was straitened because His hour had not yet come.

8 Cant. 8:7.

4 Luke 12:1.

5 Luke 12:50.

CHAPTER 7 K

The Shadow of the Cross

WE should ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of understanding to help us explain Christ's unflinching inclination to the cross. The heavenly Father had not only precluded from Jesus' soul everything that could be displeasing to Him, but He had filled it with everything capable of producing a joy worthy of His divine origin. The Father had lovingly poured forth upon Him an oil of unutterable joy resulting from the possession of all uncreated and created goods. "God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness." ¹

Good is something suitable to nature, in contrast to evil, which threatens it with ruin and loss. God has, therefore, given us a strong inclination to good and an aversion to evil. He has lodged the passions in the very heart of our being; some of them have for their object that which is good, and others, that which is evil. Of all the passions, joy, which arises from the presence of good, and sadness, which is awakened by an unavoidable evil, affect men very strongly. Accordingly, Jesus should have been spared sadness or sorrow, because He was united to the Supreme Good and the contrary universal evil should have been completely foreign to Him.

¹ Ps. 64:8.

Who can comprehend the great capacity of Christ's soul for joy? His soul was personally united to One who is goodness by nature, in an intimacy unparalleled both in the order of nature and of grace. The union of air and light is remarkable, but not permanent; the fire that causes the iron to glow and seemingly transforms it into its own substance, actually consumes and in the end destroys it. Liquids mixed together become corrupt. Union with God through grace and glory is only an accidental union whereby God joins Himself to holy souls through the created gift of grace. In Christ, however, the divinity was personally united to the sacred humanity. He was God by nature, and not by adoption. He was God, not through a simple created gift, but by an uncreated grace which is incommunicable to men or angels. The divinity was present in this union not as if there were one person in the human nature and another in the divine nature, but in such a way that the two natures subsist in the one divine Person.

Now, however perfect a union may be, it is not productive of joy and pleasure if knowledge be lacking. By His divine, infused, and beatific knowledge, Jesus knew that His soul was united to its eternal exemplar in the unity of one Person. He also knew this experimentally in the power that He exercised in nature and in grace. He knew it from the voice of His Father at His baptism and at His transfiguration. He knew it from the Holy Spirit and from many incidents of a lifetime spent in the ministry for which He came into the world. And yet, in the soul of Christ both the union and the knowledge of that union led to quite unexpected results. The inclination to suffering which grace produced there dimmed the brightness of the joy proper to His soul. It changed delight into bitter-

ness. God, the supreme good and source of everlasting happiness, concurred in the sufferings of Christ's humanity the more effectively as He was present to Him by so intimate a union. The supreme good communicated itself perfectly to the adorable humanity of Jesus, neglecting no grace necessary for its happiness; and yet there was no misfortune of a penal nature that it did not visit upon that sacred humanity. Thus, in Christ the greatness of the good received would be the measure of the sorrow endured, and His affliction would be in proportion to His joys.

Knowledge also contributed greatly to the torment endured by the soul of Christ. He honored the ceremony of the washing of the feet by a discourse which reflected the unfathomable riches of His knowledge and the ardor of His love, concluding with the words: "Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee." 2 The gospel then relates that "when Jesus had said these things, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden, into which He entered." 3 There He yielded Himself to sadness like unto the pains of death and although they did not cause Him to die, they evoked a sweat of blood that flowed to the ground. Thus disposed, He awaited the men who with giant strides were hurrying to inflict upon Him the horrible mistreatment which preceded and accompanied the sufferings of the cross.

"Because I know You, I must die; by dying I give life to the world which does not know You; by losing my life, I deliver the world from death. Heavenly Father, the world barricades itself behind a criminal ignorance of Your goodness; hence the sufferings which satisfy for its brutal ingratitude must correspond to that dreadful blindness."

² John 17:25.

Knowledge begins with wonder, which busies itself in the search for causes hitherto unknown. The knowledge which Christ had of the good things His Father had poured into His breast was the cause of His death. He drew the conclusion of the torments of the cross from the knowledge that He is the unique Son of eternity. "Heavenly Father," He says, "I know You by the same knowledge by which You beget Me. I have never departed from Your bosom, even though You have sent Me into the world. There I have done everything that would please You, paying scant heed to My Person or My rights as the unique heir to Your glory. I know You as far as You are knowable, and I love You as much as I know You are lovable."

Such words are worthy of the Son of God, and yet what should be the cause of joy to His soul was, instead, a source of sadness. Christ would not again speak except to say that His soul was sorrowful even unto death, and He began to be weary, full of fear and sadness. But He went on to accomplish what was written concerning Him. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and made higher than the heavens. . . . For the law maketh men priests who have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the Law (maketh) the Son who is perfected for evermore." 6

God marked Cain with a sign so that no man would kill him, and that wretch thought life not worth living after having inhumanly and unjustly slain his brother. Christ's Father marked His Son so that He would be put to death; He did not intend that the sign of death be distinct from Him in whom we adore the very image of divinity.

The "Son who is perfected for evermore" had then to

⁴ Mark 14:34.

⁵ Mark 14:33.

⁶ Heb. 7:26-28.

be set up on the altar of the cross as our highpriest and victim. The Jews condemned Him to death only because, when adjured by the highpriest to answer in the name of God, He admitted that He was the Son of God.⁷ Acknowledged as such by the man born blind, whose sight He had restored and then asked if he believed in the Son of God,⁸ Christ began to speak of Himself as the Good Shepherd who was to die for His sheep.⁹ Only for this reason had He become incarnate. In the next breath He said: "As the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for My sheep." ¹⁰ In other words, "I must die for men because I am the only Son of the living Father by His eternal knowledge, and the testimony that I give of My immanent production and My recognition of that fact, is the reason for martyrdom and the cause of death."

A princess was once praised for her beauty, her riches, and her rare gifts of mind. But, looking at her beauty in a mirror, she began to weep. When asked why she wept when she had so many reasons to be happy, she answered: "I weep because, beautiful as I am, I must die." How our hearts should fill with sadness when we consider that Jesus, perfect as He was, the personal image of God's goodness, the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance, had for that very reason to suffer. Although deserving of divine honors, He was to be humiliated; worthy of glory, He was to be mortified. He who was the center of all joy was to be in every way an abyss of sorrows.

⁷ Matt. 26:63.

⁹ John 10:11.

⁸ John 9:35-38.

¹⁰ John 10:15.

CHAPTER 8 K

Christ's Preoccupation with Death

"CHRIST did not please Himself," writes St. Paul.¹ So universal a statement means that His understanding, judgment, memory and the treasures of His knowledge gave Him no pleasure. He did not desire that His fullness of grace make an impression of joy in that portion of His soul which was engulfed in sadness. He refused to take delight in the glory that was His and the unspeakable happiness naturally flowing from it. His miracles and wonders filled those who saw them with admiration, but brought no joy to His heart.

Jesus did not please Himself. He did not take pleasure in the fact that His blessed soul was united to a divine Person. Surely no thought could have filled the faculties of Christ's sacred humanity with greater joy than to recall the honor it possessed by reason of His natural and divine filiation, but the inclination to death which dominated His heart unceasingly did not allow such a thought to produce the delight that arises from the presence of the supreme good.

¹ Rom. 15:3.

The gospels provide us with ample proof of this statement. Whenever anyone addressed Christ as the Son of God, He turned His attention from this remarkable dignity to the degradation to which His passion and death would reduce Him. Had this happened only once, we might suppose that He had some other plan in mind, but as He always resorted to it, Paul's words are universally true: Jesus took no pleasure in His own Person. As the Psalmist said: "The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell upon Me." 2 When on Mt. Tabor Christ heard the Father's voice from heaven saying, "Thou art my Son," He took no notice, but spoke of the horrors of Calvary. He turned from His own glorious transfiguration and filled His mind with His ignominious death, and not even the refulgence of that blessed light could prevent Him from seeing the bloody wounds which would cover His whole body. In His imagination He saw three crosses, contrasting with the three tabernacles of Tabor. To one of these crosses He was to be savagely nailed. The two thieves who were to keep Him company in His torment took precedence over the majesty surrounding Moses and Elias who had come to render Him homage. The mockeries and scorn and foul blasphemies had more effect on Him than did a reverent testimony to His greatness. And lest anyone should speak of His glory before His passion, He imposed silence upon the three disciples concerning the things they had seen and heard during that rapturous moment on the blessed Mount.3 His first wish was, it seems, to drive the memory of it from their minds by speaking to them of that which could effectively dampen their ardor. Speaking of John the Baptist as Elias, He told them that Elias had already come without their recognizing Him,

² Rom. 15:3.

that they had treated Him as badly as possible, and finally, that the Son of Man would have to suffer the greatest cruelty the malice of creatures could devise.

Again, in full view of all who had gathered around Him when they heard of the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus, a voice like thunder was heard from Heaven, saying: "I have glorified Him and will glorify Him again." 4 Jesus, for whom the Father gave this testimony, replied in these surprising words: "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to Myself," 5 signifying, as St. John says, what death He would die. Jesus was replying to the voice of His Father who spoke to Him of glory, of a glory equal to that of its principle, and He did so by mentioning the ignominy of the cross. He did not reply so much to the word of the Eternal Father as to the inclination of His spirit and the thought of His heart.

The thought of death, the central point of all Job's philosophy, led him to say: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." By "thither" Job meant the tomb, and not the womb of his mother, for as Nicodemus remarked to the Son of God, a man cannot return to his mother's womb. "Thither" simply revealed Job's pre-occupation with the thought of death. We do not name things which are ever present to us, but merely allude to them, and as the tomb is the place to which all men must go and which the holy Job ever had in mind, it was enough for him to point to it with his finger, as it were, without naming it. When Magdalen spoke to Christ, mistaking Him for the gardener of the place where her dear Master had been buried, she said: "If you have taken Him away," "without specifying what

⁴ John 12:28.

7 John 20:15.

⁵ John 12:30-33.

⁶ John 3:4.

or who. Her memory prompted her to seek with tearful solicitude the One who by love was Lord over all of her faculties. He had made such an impression on her mind and heart that she thought everyone felt toward Him as she did. That was why she did not mention His name.

Such examples reveal the secret of Jesus' reply to the glorious word the Father had just uttered in His honor. They show that He placed the greatness of His exaltation amid the torments of His passion and that His love for the cross would not allow any other thought to alter His inclination to die upon its arms. This was why He so constantly reflected upon the mortality of His human nature and looked for anything that would show Him exposed to shame and suffering. As far as possible He suppressed anything that would make Him adorable and full of the glory due to the only Son of God. He seldom spoke of this, except when He knew that it would lead to His death. Always and everywhere He referred to Himself as the Son of Man, for in His mortal nature He assumed the obligation and duty of suffering and of rejecting anything that would cause Him to rejoice.

I could never quite understand how it was that Jesus did not seem to appreciate Martha's loving and respectful ministrations in His behalf. He needed such services, for while carrying out God's will He had to preserve His human life until the hour marked out for Him from all eternity had come. Yet He let it be known that He was especially pleased with Magdalen, who in the fervor of her love had lavished fragrant ointments upon Him, more out of devotion than of necessity. It had led some of the apostles to murmur over the loss the poor suffered thereby, for their misery might have been alleviated by giving them the money obtained from the sale of the ointments. This

would have been in conformity with justice and charity.8 But Jesus disapproved this sort of providence and rebuked the murmurers. Taking up Magdalen's defence and protection, He declared that He would have her act of devotion preached throughout the world.9 He desired that her action serve not only as a souvenir of His death but also as a preparation for His burial. He was half-way through a great banquet. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of Magdalen's perfumes. She had made her celebrated protestation of faith in the divinity of her adorable Master by this lavish anointing which, had it been done on anyone else, would have been considered wasteful. Christ perceived the intention of the repentant woman and, moved by that inclination which inexorably disposed His spirit for death, He put out of His mind the thought of His divine filiation and referred to His burial. "Let her alone," He said, "that she may keep it against the day of My burial." 10

The reason for His different treatment of the two sisters was that Jesus had a greater inclination toward death than toward life. He preferred those services which were prophetic of His death and preparatory to His burial to those proffered to make His life more comfortable. In truth, life was annoying to Him as long as He had not given it for the purpose for which He came into the world. That is why He praised Mary and in a way blamed Martha. When He consoled the one and publicly approved her actions, He showed that He did not put great value on the solicitude of the elder sister, even though performed at the cost of much trouble and fatigue, and, I daresay, with as much faith. It was as if anything that did not bear upon it the

⁸ Matt. 26:8.

⁹ Mark 14:9.

¹⁰ John 12:7.

stamp of His death was disagreeable to Him and whatever bore the least trace of it delighted Him.

Martha, full of faith, gave the reason for her confidence that Christ would infallibly call her brother Lazarus back to life when she said: "Yea, Lord, I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, who art come into this world." ¹¹ No sooner had He heard this, than He left the faithful Martha and went off to the tomb. He began to be troubled; He groaned in spirit and wept freely, persevering in His resolve to resist anything that could bring Him pleasure.

St. Luke tells us ¹² that the heavenly Father bore testimony at Jesus' baptism (and would again do so later, on Mt. Tabor) that Jesus was His Son, and that the Holy Spirit, source of grace in Jesus' soul, then led Jesus into the desert to fast for forty days. In St. Mark it is very simply stated: "And there came a voice from heaven: Thou art My beloved Son. And immediately the Spirit drove Him out into the desert." What connection is there between the heavens, which He saw opened, and the desert; between recognition by an all-powerful Father pleased with His beloved Son and the authority, hardships, and harsh treatment imposed upon Him? What connection between the honor He received from the visible descent of the Holy Spirit and this sudden cruel change?

St. Mark did not say that the Holy Spirit commanded, urged or inspired Him, but that it drove Him out into the desert.¹³ In so acting, the Spirit accommodated Himself to the disposition of Jesus' soul. It was the same when the voice of thunder said: "I have both glorified it (Jesus'

¹¹ John 11:27.

¹² John 11:38.

¹⁸ Mark 1:10.

name) and I will glorify it again." ¹⁴ Jesus hid Himself, as if it were shameful for Him to appear in the presence of men after having been declared, by the mouth of God, to be the image of His glory.

The spouse of the Canticle lingers in the embrace of her Beloved, her lips on His, and with great difficulty frees herself from His arms. Then she hears these words: "O fairest among women! If thou knowest not thyself, go forth, and follow after the steps of the flocks and feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds." 15 These words are the beguilements of a powerful love designed to give her a taste of the happiness of her present condition, compared to the lowliness from which she was so lovingly drawn. Not so does one treat God's only Son. The Holy Spirit, the bond and loving embrace of the godhead, casts Him forth, as it were, from the bosom of His eternal birth. And as if it were not harsh enough to deprive Him of the ravishing joys which are His by natural right, God drives Him forth from His very home as if He were a stranger; banishes Him, so to speak, as if He were not only unworthy of the divine society but undeserving of admittance into human society, forbidding Him to associate in any way with men and condemning Him to live with beasts. As St. Mark says, "He was in the desert forty days and forty nights . . . and He was with beasts." 16

¹⁴ John 12:28.

¹⁵ Cant. 1:7.

¹⁶ Mark 1:13.

CHAPTER 9 K

The Sorrow of Christ

THE foregoing considerations serve to increase in our minds the force of the inclination to suffering which grace produced in Jesus' soul. The most entrancing objects of joy had no effect upon His faculties. Occasions of joy worked cruelly upon His understanding and imagination, which anticipated all the circumstances of pain, shame, and savagery that would attend His death. By a loving disposition, God suspended those superior reasons which could have blunted His clear perception of future evils. Instead, they were made more susceptible to affliction. How difficult, in fact, how impossible it is to describe the continual martyrdom of the soul of Christ.

It is not the moment of death that inflicts the painful blow, for the separation of body and soul is not felt. It is the apprehension which precedes the separation of body and soul which causes pain. Seeing itself on the brink of the precipice, drawing into itself, nature experiences the pain suffered by men at the point of death. But here is a marvelous thing about Jesus' earthly life. Dying continually—more truly than Paul who said, "I die daily" 1—by reason of that keen natural fear produced by His knowledge of all the circumstances of His death, He nevertheless

¹ I Cor. 15:31.

presented to the world a serene face. He had such strength of spirit that He could die each moment and yet live in incredible tranquillity. He could fear death and love it, flee from it and run toward His torments. Only the Son of God could exhibit such paradoxes of nature and grace.

Our Lord once spoke to the apostles of a woman in labor who is saddened at the prospect of the pain which nature shall demand of her.² This shows us very simply what His soul was like before His passion. Let us imagine a pregnant woman who is not only worried by the accidents which from time to time bring her moments of pain, but who is mentally depressed and sad of heart because a reliable doctor has assured her that the moment she gives birth to the fruit of her womb, will be her own hour of death.

Could there be a more miserable life than this? Would not such a woman die every hour, and many times in that hour? The waiting for death and the very thought that one must die are more disturbing than death itself. This has been verified in those who are condemned to death. Then death is sweet because it puts an end to the sadness and horror it naturally arouses.

Jesus had all this in mind when He used the comparison of the woman in labor. He has left us a picture of what He went through at every moment of the day and night, everywhere He went, for more than thirty years. His body was tested by many vigils and fasts, by weariness and work; His soul was constantly battered by the vivid apprehension of His death and by those feelings which such thoughts naturally engender. The pain produced in His soul surpassed all His exterior suffering. He was fully aware at all times of what He would have to suffer, in different places,

² John 16:21.

from various persons, and in all the faculties of soul and body.

We perceive this kind of death in the words used by Him to elicit from James and John the dispositions which would merit for them that privileged place which their mother asked in His kingdom. "Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?" 3 St. Matthew had expressed this thought in terms which signified His coming passion: "Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink?" 4 By His anticipated death, Jesus offered a continual but invisible holocaust. He pictured this interior martyrdom simply, using the image of a chalice of sufferings. The very thought of it in the Garden of Olives led Him to sweat blood and reduced Him to a state of agony. He drank deeply of this chalice every moment of His life, thus verifying the word of the great Apostle: "Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell upon Me." 5

Jesus therefore suffered throughout His mortal life as if He were not subject to time, but as if He were the principle and measure of eternity. He suffered spiritually all that He was to suffer over several hours. It was as if His spirit had been seized, scourged, crowned with thorns, given gall to drink, and crushed with the pains of death.

He experienced in one and the same moment all the persecutions which cruel tyrants would direct against the Church, all the frightful martyrdoms of the saints in every age. Unfortunate schisms and grievous heresies, together with all their cursed fruits, all rose before His eyes. Merely the thought of the torments of the damned, for whom His

⁸ Mark 10:38.

⁴ Matt. 20:22.

⁵ Rom. 15:3.

coming into the world was of no avail, helped plunge His soul into a sea of sadness. Add to this the ugliness of their ingratitude and the scorn with which they would treat Him and His Father. Not without reason did He upbraid them.⁶

All these things, and many more beyond my comprehension, exercised such mastery over His faculties that indescribable sufferings were exacted from him. Moreover, unlike ours, His powers of mind and feeling continued to function as usual. By reason of the passions or countless distractions, we may at one time grasp an idea obscurely, at another with greater clarity, but ordinarily never with perfect efficiency. Christ could, however, and this meant that His soul was filled with a sadness and desolation so cruelly realistic that He could not forget them, even though surrounded by that which gave Him supreme joy.

⁶ John 15:24.

CHAPTER 10 K

Christ's Will to Die

THE most violent clashes which occurred in Christ's lifetime served only to manifest His divine patience. Throughout all His trials, His love never wearied, but it could become ruthless if His inclination to die amid the horrors of the cross was opposed in any way. Peter, the first of the apostles, is an illustration of this point. One day our Lord asked His disciples what men were saying about Him. After the others had given various answers, St. Peter, full of faith and speaking for them all, declared: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus commanded His disciples not to broadcast what they had just heard and informed them that He must go to Jerusalem, to suffer many evils there and to be put to death.

Peter was horrified to hear that one born in eternity should be abandoned to such a death. With a courage born of faith and divine revelation, he forgot himself and undertook to rebuke His dear Master and to take Him to task for having such unworthy thoughts. He pointed out to Him that what He had just said lessened the grandeur of His uncreated Sonship, and He abased too much the honor due to the living Father, and gave the lie to what He had just led his disciples to think.²

¹ Matt. 16:16.

Our Lord deliberately took exception to this hasty censure. He did violence to the sweetness of His heart and looked upon Peter, not with those eyes which once captivated him and made him an apostle, but with a face which showed His displeasure at being contradicted in the carrying out of His most pressing inclination. Scornfully He dismissed Peter from His presence, calling him a scandal. "Must the man I have chosen from men to be the unshakable foundation of My Church be a stumbling-block for its beloved Spouse? Should the one to whom I gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven be the first to hinder Me in My work by shutting to Me the gates of death and the avenues of torments? Ah, that the exercise of the power which I wished him to use in such a way as to bind God Himself, should be the enemy of My love and undertake to constrain My inclination so that I may not suffer from it. Had a seraphim spoken thus, I could abase him as far as, in my goodness, I have raised him up. The depth of his fall would be measured by the height to which he had been raised in glory, had he dared resist the infinite violence of that weight which gives Me no rest."

The meekness of Christ is ravishing in all the events of His life which gave proof of the eminent degree of His virtues. I must confess that those virtues which belonged to Him as a natural consequence of the consummate grace of the uncreated union arouse my love and admiration because of their beauty, but His meekness arouses a kind of horror when it allows Satan to draw near to Christ in the desert, to extend his sacrilegious hands to embrace the sacred majesty of Christ, and to transport Him to the pinnacle of the temple and to the top of a mountain.³

Jesus in the hands of Satan! What a horrible thought! How frightening to think of Jesus in such an embrace!

⁸ Matt. 4:5-8.

That Jesus suffered or permitted it and even submitted His will to that of the infernal monster would seem incredible.

Still, when Peter uttered a hasty word, Jesus' natural amiability suddenly turned to sharpness and His mildness to anger. And because the prince of the apostles had blurted out without thinking, "God forbid, that the only Son of God be put to death! We will take care to prevent anything like that," He provoked in Christ a reaction which hitherto men had not seen in Him. His usual even temper hardened toward St. Peter. Even Peter's later cowardly disloyalty was more bearable to Him that this opposition to these words about the cross, for although Peter deserved the terrible strictness of God's justice for his denial of Christ, our Lord renewed on His face all the original beauty which blows and spittle had obscured. Moreover, He seemed to have studied new graces so as to look upon him more lovingly, changed though he was by the enormity of his crimes into a wretched demon.

But on this occasion of which we are now speaking Peter was not yet quite himself after the rapture he had experienced at the Transfiguration, when, touched by the love which this knowledge had enkindled in his heart, he said, "It shall not be so." Jesus then deprived him of the title of "Blessed" which He had with praise just given him as an honorable recompense. He scolded Peter for his ignorance, although shortly before He had declared that Peter's acquisition of sublime knowledge was from the selfsame Spirit who was the principle of His own incarnation. He does not now recognize any divine revelation in Peter's words, which reflect natural motives and the feelings of flesh and blood. One might assume that He preferred the cross to His dignity as Son of God, death to His eternal birth, the ignominies of His passion to that divine splendor amid which He is wondrously begotten, or that He loved more the ugliness of His wounds than His comeliness as the perfect image of the sovereign good.

How inflexible an inclination it was! It disposed our good and sovereign Master to hate or at least to reject whatever did not further the cross. It led Him to change what could transport Him with rapture into urgent reasons for horrible sufferings. How cruel this disposition, to make Him so unyielding to His friends; yet He apparently could not refuse His sweetest favors to wicked men who were resolved to bring about His death. But let Satan be the agent of His death, and He would permit him to do what he dared against His divine Person. He advanced to meet the executioners who sought His death, anticipated them, appeared before them and gave Himself freely to them with a kind word.4 They were so struck with astonishment that for a moment they forgot the rage that envy had aroused in their hearts against Him. They fell backwards, stunned. They would doubtless have remained thus had not Jesus, urged on by that inclination which ceaselessly ravished His mind, miraculously restored them so that they might inflict upon Him all the evil of which human nature devoid of supernatural grace and abandoned to its own weakness is capable.

Judas made it possible for the Jews to carry out their detestable plan, which up to then had always come to grief. As Judas drew near, Jesus resolved to bestow upon him the greatest favor possible to a creature either on earth or in heaven. The angels were highly honored in that they were commanded to adore Christ. The holy apostles will say in their glory that they had the honor of seeing Him with their own eyes, of hearing Him with their own ears, and of touching Him with their own hands. Thomas,

⁴ John 18:4-8.

moreover, will say that he alone put his hand in the opening of Christ's side. John the Beloved will boast that he was often privileged to rest sweetly upon the bosom of Jesus. The other John, the Baptist, will humbly recall how Jesus had bowed down beneath the right hand that he raised in baptism over the head of the God of glory. And Mary Magdalen will tell everyone that she laid hold of His feet. But Judas can lay claim to His lips.

What! Shall hell laugh at heaven? Shall the kingdom of Belial triumph over the kingdom of God? Jesus set so high a price upon the death which Judas made possible for Him that He proved that a man who has given all his substance for what he loves, thinks that in the enjoyment of his new possession he is immeasurably richer than before. Jesus is the rich merchant of the gospel; 5 seeking the treasure of death and not able to find it in Himself, sold all that He had to purchase the field (the cross) wherein it was hidden. He closed His eyes and saw this detestable betrayer in all the ugliness of his crime and the eternal despair into which he cast himself. Then He opened his eyes to see Judas provide the means of satisfying that love which brought the Son of God down from the embraces of the Holy Spirit in the bosom of the living Father to the cruel suffering of death on the cross.

When Jesus kissed Judas, love triumphed over justice. The tyranny of His resolve was victorious over His wisdom. He would prefer that we doubt His prudence here rather than His singleness of purpose. He called Judas "friend," and St. Peter, "Satan." He banished Peter from His sight and presence, but suffered Judas to hold Him in his arms and even to kiss Him.

⁵ Matt. 13:44.

CHAPTER 11 K

The Charity of Christ

IF the overpowering inclination toward the cross produced such strange results as far as Christ's knowledge was concerned, His charity fared no better. The fruit of charity is a joy superior to the senses, but in Christ, who was personally united to the substantial love of the divinity, that joy was suspended.

The presence of a good causes joy in those faculties which are capable of enjoying a good. Joy perfects them, and the soul desires that joy. Now charity is a source of joy to the subject into which it is infused, because it makes the living God to be present to the soul. That holy love which transports us to the heights and unites our soul to God in so marvelously intimate a way is nothing but the result of His love for us. It was not we who began to love Him, but He who has first loved us, as St. John says.¹ Love tends toward union and strives to bring together the lover and the object of his love. The love of God knows no obstacle; it is all-powerful and cannot fail to bring about that presence which is necessary if the Creator is to be united to His creature.

At the same time that divine love touches our spirit, the personal Love which shows the Trinity to be loving

¹ I John 4:10.

and lovable gives itself conjointly and inseparably to us. "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us." 2 Through this precious gift the other two adorable Persons are also united to us in the unity of His love. The same bond that unites the divine Persons in an uncreated love, binds us to them in an incomprehensible manner, though by a created gift. This means that a holy soul, even before it produces any act of the love of God, already possesses the object of its love by charity, through a kind of intimate and secret presence. It rejoices at this by acts of love which transport it into the divine bosom wherein it sees itself so happily bound. This joy is a marvelous participation of that joy which, in God, is the fulfillment of the divine and immanent processions. God created all things outside the Godhead according to the dictates of providence and then rested on the seventh day. So too, in some incomprehensible manner proper to His immanent action, He rests in the Holy Spirit, who binds the uncreated Persons together in one love. Now the joy that is proper to God consists in union with, or rather in the oneness of this omnipotent Love, and He wishes us to share in its joy. In the Upper Room, just before His death, He had asked His Father to grant us a participation in His adorable oneness with the Father, "that they may have [Our] joy filled in themselves." 3

It is also because of this prayer that spiritual joy is among the rich blessings brought about by the presence of the Holy Spirit in a holy soul. Both in God and in creatures, He is the source of joy because He is substantial love—in God, by His immanent production, and in us, by the created grace which he infuses into our souls and by which He is united and conjoined to us. Nor is He alone when

² Rom. 5:5.

united to us, for He causes the divine Persons of the adorable Trinity also to be present in us.

In this world charity never reaches the ultimate perfection it hopes to attain in heaven by seeing and enjoying God. Not that the blessed lose the charity enjoyed on earth,4 for while there is no place for faith and hope in heaven, charity enters the very wine-cellar of the Beloved. Man advances from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to maturity, gradually ridding himself of the imperfections of the former states but intensifying the perfections of those states with the advent of maturity. Similarly, those wayfarers who are raised to the blessed heights of comprehensors in glory do not thereby lose the perfection of charity which they had in the world, but leave aside only its weakness and defects and are clothed with its lustrous perfection.

But even the charity of the blessed is not yet in its natural place, for it attains its last perfection only in the soul of Jesus where it reaches its plenitude. All who have the honor of being admitted to His holy love can slake their thirst at this source. No matter at what degree heat is observed, it has everything that heat should have, but heat is hotter in the fire. The light of other bodies is as darkness when compared with that of the stars, but light does not reach its ultimate beauty until we see it in the sun. Water is the same whether it flows in great rivers or fountains or streams, but it never rests until it has flown into the sea, which is its natural terminus.

The charity of the blessed is incomparably more perfect than that of wayfarers, in whom it is hidden under the ashes of a thousand imperfections. It will attain its full glory in heaven, before the Spouse whom it no longer

⁴ I Cor. 13:8.

adores in the obscurity of faith but contemplates face to face in the "splendor of the saints." In heaven charity cannot fail; its fire and flames will be forever preserved in all their vigor, like a fire without smoke or embers. There it is filled with joy and peace. There, assured of happiness, it laughs at its enemies. Possessing the supreme good, it makes the blessed ineffably happy and living images of divinity. There one learns by experience rather than speculation what is the happiness of Him who is the principle of good for all men.

The charity of this life does not and cannot fill the capacity of our spirit. It lodges in a subject that can change and know trouble; it may be mixed with self-love, self-seeking, and selfish interests. As a result, when a soul has the misfortune of falling into grave sin, charity abandons that soul which may have sworn a thousand oaths that nothing in all the world was strong enough to separate it from God. The charity of the wayfarer is usually tender and delicate rather than strong and generous. It needs to be strengthened against fear, protected from ceaseless worries, fortified by a vigilant heart, and encompassed by humility to fortify it against the world, the flesh, and the devil.⁵

Yet, the charity of the saints brings them joy during this life, too. The saints had their fears, were pressed with cares, fatigued by battles, and sometimes tried cruelly as martyrs and delivered to horrible deaths. But their charity brought them such joy that they sometimes were enraptured by a sudden deluge of delight which flowed from their awareness of the divine presence.

Who, then, shall understand the peace enjoyed by the blessed in glory? Their charity is liberated from anything

⁵ Cant. 8:8-9.

that could alter it in the slightest. It is freed from all the imperfections of this mortal life. As St. Paul says, no one can know how great are the things God has prepared for His friends.⁶ Not only does the vision of God completely fill the glorified soul, but it imposes a happy necessity upon it, making it impossible for the soul to resist or to admit any other pleasure, thought, or diversion. The soul is filled to capacity and the measure of its joy spills over. For all eternity the soul enters into the joy of his Lord and nothing can alter or interrupt this incomparable joy, not even the damnation of those whom the soul has loved on earth.

The proper place to find charity is the adorable soul of Christ, where it has all the perfection befitting His dignity as an uncreated Person. The resulting joy should likewise be the greater because His love infinitely surpasses all other loves, whether of men or of angels, though these were to be multiplied without end. As the Father has given Him a name above every other name, one that makes Him adorable to all the choirs of angels, whom He commands because He is their Creator, God has also anointed Him with the oil of joy. He is the source from which all souls may draw constant delight, living as they do by the life of the divinity.

It is indeed remarkable that an anointing which was the source of joy in Jesus' soul did not exercise its full effect, but that His soul was never for a moment free from cruel pain. Remarkable, too, that this precious oil was, contrary to its customary communicative and penetrating nature, sealed off in the superior part of His soul for the reason that He loved justice and was the declared enemy of wickedness. Otherwise it would have produced its effects

⁶ I Cor. 2:9.

upon His sensitive faculties; but they by divine dispensation were deprived of that joy. Jesus' love was a plenteous love, worthy of God's only Son. Normally it would have filled all His inward and outward faculties with a proportionate joy. But as He wished to satisfy for our sins, He assumed a condition suited to the work He came to do upon earth. He had therefore not established the fullness of joy for His own satisfaction and enjoyment; His satisfaction would be found in the harsh torments whereby the kingdom of evil could be destroyed and the empire of justice be built up. It was out of love for that justice that He deliberately made Himself miserable.

The ancients formerly used two kinds of oil. One kind was for those who had been invited to banquets, the other was reserved for the burial of the dead. Jesus' holy and adorable soul was filled with two kinds of oil: the festive oil of the beatific vision and the funeral oil of His love for justice. The former anointing is the fountainhead of pleasure and joy and disposed His spirit for perfect and eternal happiness. The other was an anointing for death and flooded His faculties with cruel sufferings. He was anointed to be immortal and to be mortal. One anointing rendered Him impassible; another made Him capable of suffering. He was anointed for glory and for the cross.

CHAPTER 12 K

Love's Delay

ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS once said that if Christ had allowed Himself to be slain as an infant, during the persecution by Herod, He would have destroyed the cause of our salvation. By "cause of our salvation" the Saint meant that great love which Jesus bears us. In fact, the very love which unceasingly drew Him toward death held Him from embracing death when it was possible for Him to have died. That love caused Him continually to sigh after death but at the same time it led Him to flee it and to hold it in horror.

Moses' mother, yielding to the comeliness and innocence of her infant son, nursed Him secretly, in violation of Pharao's command. Yet the day came when her child could no longer be concealed, and by postponing His inevitable death she had only made it more painful. When she entrusted him to the mercy of the waters in a basket made of bulrushes she might have said: "Alas, dear child, what have we done but increase your pains without lessening our own? Had you been strangled when you were born, had your birth been enshrouded by the same misfortune as that of the other male infants of our nation, your death would have been less bitter to you than it is now, nor would we have felt so keenly the unhappiness of

losing you. You would now be among those things which are no more, whose memory causes as little suffering as those things which have never been known, although you would be enjoying the peace of the Patriarchs in Abraham's bosom. Tigers that we are, must we slay with our own hands what we have saved from other hands; must you consider us as your murderers even before you could acknowledge us as the authors of your life?"

And Mary! Where are you going with the Christ Child? Why are you flying with Him into Egypt? Don't you know why He came into the world? And if you know it, why, thinking to save Him, do you keep Him for a death whose agony will outstrip anything that could cause His death now, while He is garbed in swaddling clothes? How will you be able to bear it when men affix Him to the gibbet with large and cruel nails, if at the thought of a swordstroke you flee with this Child to a strange land? Your foresight seems to be hurtful to your Son and, quite unlike yourself, you increase His means of dying instead of lessening them. The strokes of the lash, the thorns, and other painful torments, are these mere nothings, that you prefer the sweetness of His infancy to the extraordinary hardships which He must one day undergo? As he grows older, His sufferings will increase.

But it is Mary's divine maternity that makes her act as she does. She obeys orders from heaven, and her will adjusts itself to the role this Infant shall play.

If Jesus' death is a sign of God's anger, as Paul says,¹ then its postponement over many years for the purpose of making it the more trying is surely the result of a very great anger. The Father wishes and yet does not wish that His Son die; Jesus, too, wishes and does not wish to die.

¹ Rom. 3:25.

Torn in two opposing directions, both His life and His death are filled with sorrow and suffering.

Since Jesus came down from heaven in order to die, we should not be surprised that He suffered at not being able to die from the very beginning of His life. But infancy is not capable of great torments; its limbs are delicate, its flesh is weak, its body small. Moreover, so short a time would not suffice to show us the extent of His love. The intolerable weight of His inclination leads Him to say: "Why must I be held back and meet with opposition to the baptism wherewith I am to be baptized?" 2 In the meantime He anticipates His passion by suffering a continual but secret death. He did not die, but He made up for that by His keen appreciation of the many disagreeable inconveniences and pains He would have to undergo during the discomforts of a long life in performing many toilsome tasks and as a result of the various ages whose infirmities He assumed.

What wise man would wish to become an infant again? What mature man would wish to return to swaddling clothes, to be carried about by a nurse, to be fed, clothed, and bathed as tiny infants are? If we judge God by the rules of our senses and by the light of reason, all this is shameful; but if we judge Him by the rules of His love, we see that He is wiser than we, for amid His greatest humiliations His lovableness stands out all the more. Where the wicked man sees only dishonor, we perceive a further cause for honoring Him.

Our good Master took upon Himself the feebleness and other conditions of infancy, but He did not assume its ignorance. He was not wiser in Heaven, where He sits at the Father's right hand, than He was in the womb of His mother. The Child she carried within her was not an

² Luke 12:50.

ignorant child, but was full of wisdom.3 Within her holy womb He assumed a position in no way different from that taken by other children in the wombs of their mothers. His heavenly Father had so decreed it. This thought, so overpowering to the saints, occasions the reproaches of those who are not saints. They fail to take into account that He who is Wisdom itself wished to experience some of the weakness of infancy and to suffer all the discomforts and necessities of that age. Not content with that, He wished to advance slowly through the other years until that year in which He died, in order to advance in age and wisdom in the presence of God and in the sight of men.4 The evangelist links age and wisdom together here to teach us that He grew day by day, year by year, hour by hour, in that knowledge which is gained by experience. For Him the years were as books, the months as leaves, the seasons as pages, the days and hours as sentences and paragraphs in which He studied, by experiencing pain and suffering, the grim reality of His Father's plan.

Of all the instruments that God used to heighten the anguish of His Son, time was one of the most effective. Jesus ate only when He was hungry, drank only when He was thirsty. Though tired, He did not always rest, and did not sleep even during those hours when sleep pressed heavily upon Him. He did not walk as His will dictated, did not follow where His love was always drawing Him. He complained of suffering distress at not dying and life became burdensome to Him. When the apostles brought Him food from the Samaritan village, He told them that His food was to do the will of His heavenly Father. When on this occasion He asked the Samaritan woman for water to slake the thirst which accompanied His fatigue, He quickly forgot His own gratification to make the woman

³ Jer. 31:22.

long for waters springing up into life everlasting.6 "It is written in the beginning of the Book that I do Thy will."

How unyielding and cruel a law! How rich in desolation is the will of His Father. This law and this will had strewn the course of Jesus' life with numberless discomforts from the moment of His conception until He became an adult. It was as a man that He wished to experience the torments which were to effect our perfect ransom, but until that moment, what severities and humiliations He had to suffer! Who can number the painful hours and days He endured or who can imagine His poverty and need? Had He died at birth He would not have known the infirmities of infancy and childhood, the activities of youth would not have strengthened Him, and the anxieties to which a grown man is subject would not have disturbed Him. We would never have known of His vigils, His fasting and fatigue, or of the opprobrium, suffering, and other trials which accompany the different ages. We see from all this how far His great love extended.

The Blessed Virgin thought it proper to cry out to her Beloved that He fly quickly away, else she would have been deprived of the proof of the strength of His love if He had been included among the victims of cruel Herod. It was by a stratagem of love, not fear, that Mary was prompted to carry Him off to Egypt, for if He had wished to die almost as soon as He was born, He would not have been able to undergo those sufferings which exceed the capacities of so slight a body. Had He delivered Himself from these greater evils, He would not have given proof that His love was stronger than all the evils that had for so many years surrounded Him.

It was not that He fled; He was holding Himself in re-

⁶ John 4:14.

serve. He preserved His life only in order to make it more useful for us. He deferred His death to make it more precious for us at a later date. Speaking through His prophet, He Himself attributes His flight to the strength of His love. "God hath girt me with strength, teacheth my hands to war, and hath made my arms like a brazen bow. Thou hast made my feet like the feet of harts, who are quick to flee lightly away."

He seems to say: "Because you want Me to lead a laborious life filled with grievous trials and have saved Me for a dreadful death, nailed to the cross, I realize that I should flee an easier death and await that other which by comparison will be more horrible still. And while I wait for it, I suffer new deaths, many deaths more cruel than death itself."

As I contemplate the presentation of the Christ Child in the temple by Mary, His Mother, and hear Simeon and Anna speaking the words of God amid ecstasy and transports of joy, my heart fills with pity. It is as if God speaks through Simeon: "Mother, this head is not large enough for the thorn-crown I have prepared for it. Those shoulders are not strong enough for the weight they must carry. There is not enough blood in those veins to satisfy My justice. Those hands are too delicate and too thin for the heavy nails that must pierce them. Those arms and legs do not fit the length and width of the cross. This body is not large enough to receive the blows of the scourges that must be given it. Take this Child back to your home, and when He has all the necessary requisites, it will be time to present Him to Me."

⁷ Ps. 17:33-35.

CHAPTER 13 K

Love's Generosity

JESUS wished to save us not so much by His absolute power (for He can do whatever He wants to do), as by the rigorous laws of His justice. He did not consider merely that satisfaction of which His divine Person was capable, but He willed a suffering in His human nature which would correspond to so important a satisfaction. Theology teaches that God, who is infinitely wise, might have satisfied divine justice in an infinite number of ways. He might have chosen any man He liked in order to humble His divine Person in that human nature. Such a man would have had to experience all the vicissitudes of age, time, place, and seasons, suffering in them the harshest torments possible in a human life. He would have needed a strong. robust body; one capable of feeling pain. His soul, too, would have to be able to feel interior pain. All kinds of evils would have been inflicted upon this soul by men or by the demons; torments leveled at His senses (whether internal or external), at every part of His body, at all the faculties of His soul, at everything that belonged to Himneighbors, friends, possessions—in a word, everything that might contribute to His afflictions.

Thus did Jesus offer Himself. The exactitude of the satis-

faction He offered to the Father corresponded to the infinite grandeur of His uncreated Person which, in His assumed nature, He humbled even to the shameful death of the cross. It also pleased Him to exercise this severity on His human nature, causing it to suffer in every way possible in this present life.

The actions and sufferings of Christ were the actions and sufferings of one who was both God and man together. Such actions theologians call *theandric*, that is, humanly divine and divinely human. The least of these was of infinite value, and hence was more than sufficient to obtain forgiveness for all sins, and to satisfy the omnipotent God who had been so grievously offended by miserable man.

The least of His actions was powerful enough to blot out anything that could keep man from reaching heaven. However, God did not consider what He could do by His power and absolute authority, nor what His creature could do when helped by His grace. He wedded the liberty of our freedom with His own infallible will, which can never be frustrated, to make us admire the gentleness and the strength of His ways. Yet His infallible omnipotence did not cost us our liberty. He accommodated Himself to that liberty, lest He be less acting than forced to act. He acted in virtue of a principle which was proper to Him and which gave Him control over those actions which He elicited with due acknowledgment of His dependence upon His Creator.

The chief obstacle to man's salvation was his ignorance of God's love for him; hence the absence of the love he owes to God. In this obligation to love is found the perfection of this life and the next. The obstacle had to be removed by the merits of God's only Son, given to the world so that by the very greatness of the gift man might know

the great love that had motivated it and thus surrender himself to the divine embrace.

Love is God's very nature. He cannot live without knowing Himself nor can He exist without loving Himself as He deserves to be loved. Love is a perfection proper to God. so much so that He cannot for one moment cease from the act of loving. However, it comes as a surprise to hear Christ say to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." 1 He loved the world though the world was unworthy of love and was hostile to Him. He loved it, not because our services could in any way add to the eminence of His being or the riches of His infinite perfection, for His is the plenitude of glory. He bore witness to His love for the world although through our enormous crimes we are deserving of His justice. He wished us well, knowing full well how insolent our behavior would be when confronted with His goodness. The more reprehensible our lack of comprehension, the more prompt and generous would be the outpourings of His astounding revelations.

But His love was not unreasonable, for goodness is of God's very nature. In loving He observed no measure; He loved the world against the forms of law and above all created understanding. Jesus Himself could express its greatness only by pointing to the great fruit it produced.

"God has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." He did not give the world the cherubim or seraphim, but a Person who could elevate the life and actions of Christians to the bosom of the Father. Behold the gift of God: His only Son. All that the Son has is His Father's, so much so that although He is distinct from His Father and another than His Father, He is not without

¹ John 3:16.

His Father. That which is not proper to the Father, He receives from Him by an immanent production which continues throughout eternity. The Son is still begotten today as He was begotten from all eternity. His is the happy necessity of being distinct from the Father and yet sharing the same infinite, immense and indivisible substance of the Father in all its greatness, richness and glory. Thus He who begets Him reserves nothing at all, except his incommunicable quality of Father.

Jesus is so much the only Son of the Father that He exhausts, so to speak, the power of the divinity to engender. Only to Him can the quality of Son belong. And although, to speak in a human way, the Son exhausts the generative power of God, it still remains proper to the Father to beget Him without ceasing. God gave His Son to the world to be crucified by the world and for it. He gave Him, not to appear in it full of majesty and a king of glory, but to be scorned, to be the opprobium of men, and to be afflicted by the world. What is more, He gave Him that He might suffer there from Himself, for Jesus was never so intimately tormented as by His own Person. His entire life was a kind of extraordinary spectacle of His love for us. He said to Pilate: "For this was I born and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth." 2 And the most important truth, as far as man's salvation is concerned, is the love which God has for him.

Jesus came to bear witness to God's love, and it had been foretold by the prophets that He would appear in this role.³ But was it enough to show us His great love, that God should have sent His Son here below, that He manifest Him to the world in all the grandeur befitting His august birth? Or, if He had resolved to obtain satisfaction for our

² John 18:37.

crimes by His death, He certainly would have convinced us of the prodigality of His charity, if Jesus had given up His life the very moment He came forth from the womb of His Mother. It is the quintessence of love to die willingly for one's beloved. As St. Paul said: "For scarce for a just man will one die." 4

What need was there to add nails, a cross, thorns, the lash, wounds, opprobrium, spittle, blasphemies, agony, fears, unimaginable horrors and distress? Why did He not appear in the world as Adam did, a full-grown man, with a body fully developed? Why come by way of generation? Why the nine months hidden in the womb? Why did He wish to be born in great poverty, amid straw and cold, to be nursed while in swaddling clothes, and wrapped in linen bands? Who can understand the miseries that exercised His patience, and which He deigned to accept without respite for thirty-three years? If a gesture, a breath, a tear from His eyes, or an act of His will had more dignity than was required for the ransom of numberless worlds, why so many painful circumstances which made His condition more miserable than that of all other creatures?

Dear God, what does our love mean to You? Are You not sufficiently happy without us? Though all men and angels were cold to Your love and goodness, Your glory would be undiminished. Reason reveals enough of Your beauty to us to ravish us with Your great perfection. How could you doubt our friendship? We shall be spectators in the great theater of the universe, looking on the many marvels which reproach us for our lack of fidelity toward You when we should serve You and recognize our dependence upon You! You wanted to show us what the love of God can do, how it is the cause of the ecstasy in

⁴ Rom. 5:7.

the bosom of those whom You honor with Your friendship. Stop here, therefore, and go no further. Be content to have given Your Son to the world, because that grace can have had no other motive or principle than Your love. In loving us so, You have shown Yourself exceedingly good, and just, and wise, and powerful.

CHAPTER 14 K

No Greater Love

ALL God's benefactions toward men have their cause and origin in His creative love, although another proximate and mediate cause may be ascribed to them. This applies even to the visible sending of the Holy Spirit, one of the fruits of the passion of Christ, which was its meritorious and impetratory cause. The coming of the Son of God, however, cannot have another principle or meriting cause, because no created being could merit either the principle of merit (grace), or the Incarnation, which is the source of this grace.²

Photinus maintained that Christ was first sent as a mere man, distinct from God, and merited the grace to become the Son of God by a lifetime of virtue. According to him, the union between humanity and the Person of the Word followed upon the meritorious actions performed by Jesus as a mere man among other men. True believers are horrified at such blasphemy, for our faith commands us to adore the sacred humanity of Jesus which was elevated to a personal union with God's only begotten Son, without ever having been joined to a created person, not even at its conception by the Holy Spirit in the chaste womb of the Blessed Mother.

¹ John 14:26.

² John 1:17.

The love of God alone is the cause of the Incarnation. Jesus was produced by the Holy Spirit (the personal love of the divinity) as a work for which no other cause can be ascribed than love, as Our Lord pointed out to Nicodemus when He wished to make him admire that grace which is the basis of all man's happiness and the subject of Gabriel's message.

Once this profound truth is accepted, we can see in its light that the sending of the Son of God upon earth is the perfect proof and is more than enough to convince us of God's great love for us. Without that necessity which is the enemy of freedom, without hope of any profit, honor, or pleasure, He gave what was dearest to His heart. And because men did not know of this love, He wished to reveal it to them in an absolutely clear manner. If to love is to give, if to love much is to give much, if of all gifts there is nothing greater than to give oneself, and if, of all things capable of giving themselves, there is nothing greater than God, men will certainly have to confess that there is no better proof of God's love than His giving us His Son.

Yet such was not the final proof. Jesus came to give in the nature He had taken from us. When Jacob made peace with Laban and raised up a stone as a witness to their mutual agreement, he assembled other stones around that one, and called the whole the "heap" or "pile of covenant." ⁸ That stone was clearly a figure of Jesus, who is the true witness of the eternal friendship which God contracted with man in the mystery of the Incarnation. But as if this witness were not yet enough to impress upon our minds the greatness of His charity, He wished to be born only to subject Himself to the rigorous necessity of dying. And because He is the origin and source of eternal life, He could

^{*} Gen. 31:45-47.

not find in Himself a cause of death, but had to seek it from outside. He willed that terrible torments should violently tear His soul from His body when it was drained of the last drop of His blood. The birth and death of Jesus were the two columns engraved with most compelling proofs of His holy love. "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son." "God commendeth His charity toward us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us." No one who attempts to judge these two adorable mysteries by standards other than the love of God has ever been able to be persuaded of their truth.

Every ransom supposes an agreement on a satisfactory price, for otherwise although one should pay a certain amount or more, it would not be a purchase exactly, but a gift. If we consider man's redemption from the point of view of the price paid, we see that every one of Christ's actions had, by reason of His divine Person, all the necessary dignity and value. But unless taken in conjunction with the cross, the holy and sacred actions of His entire life were not agreeable either to the eternal Father or to the Son who offered them for our salvation. Therefore we must conclude that the actions of Jesus' life, conjoined to His death, all formed but a single price, but considered in themselves and apart from His death, they are added proofs or witnesses of God's great love for us. We might say that His death was a duty of loving necessity (a conditional necessity, however), and that the other acts of His life were simply indications of His extraordinary charity in our regard.

Had Jesus been slain in His early youth, or come into the world in another way than do human beings, we should have been deprived of all these goods. It is therefore no cause for marvel that the same weight inclined Him to death and gave Him the contrary inclination to flee and avoid it; that the same love which ravished Him on the cross made Him suffer its delay; and that if he chafed at not dying soon enough, He was careful to put off the hour of His death in order to increase His sufferings the more, thereby leaving us infinite proofs of His boundless love. He gave them to us from the moment of His conception in the womb of His Mother and during the nine months He lay there captive. He confirmed them by His birth in a manger and multiplied them again and again as He lived through the various stages of life, encountering the many trials contrived by divine providence and by His own love with the deliberate intent of making Him suffer in every way possible.

What man could count His sufferings? Who could tell of His long fastings, imagine the warmth of His instructions, or do justice to His indefatigable care to realize the business of our salvation? No one can understand the desolation of His soul or the persecution launched against Him by the Jews, or number the interior crosses which incessantly made of His soul a cruel Gehenna. The sands of the seashore and the drops of water in the ocean are not more numerous than were His sufferings.

Dear God, how clearly that mountain of torments and sufferings testifies to Your great love for us and reproaches us for our coldness and base ingratitude toward You. We can no longer remain ignorant of Your holy love, bathed as we are by the bright light that floods the universe, igniting living flames capable of setting everything on fire. Louis of Granada once said that creatures were so many glowing coals by which we may experience the delightful warmth of their Creator. Will not the works and sufferings of Jesus produce in us that effect for which He came ("I

am come to bring fire upon earth") and transform us into the same love which caused Him to become man? The heavens announce the greatness of God by as many mouths as it has stars and the whole universe reflects the shining rays of His glory. But Jesus is a more lovely world than the one in which we dwell. All that the firmament contains of grandeur is truly nothing in his presence. Surely, then, His life and death will deeply impress upon our minds how much He loves us. Was there ever a love like that of Jesus? Has any man ever done for his friend what the Son of God has done and suffered for His enemies? We can no longer refuse our hearts to Him, for He endured all things that we might profit by a knowledge of His love. He Himself had no need of such things, but they would make us realize we should love Him without reserve, as He has truly loved us.

CHAPTER 15 K

Love's Abandonment

IT would seem that when the moment for completely satisfying His inclination had come, that it should then have been quiescent. But it would not be content even with that toward which its violence directed it. It was more painful than the cross itself. Jesus did not complain to His Father about His humiliation in death. He was silent during the scourging and gave no sign of the pain caused by the thorns, the heavy cross, or the piercing nails. But as He saw death approaching to end His sufferings, He complained to His Father that He had been abandoned by Him.

Only St. Matthew and St. Mark record the fact that Christ uttered this word of abandonment and that one of those standing near the cross ran quickly, dipped a sponge in vinegar, and raised it to His mouth on the end of a stick. St. John wrote of Jesus' cry of thirst, which St. Matthew and St. Mark have omitted, although they observed that someone gave Him to drink. His "My God! why have You abandoned Me?" summoned the Father as a witness to His thirst to suffer for men, a thirst which neither His torments nor death itself could assuage.

Jesus seemed to say: "Holy Father, You have given Me

¹ Mark 15:34-36; Matt. 27:46-48.

many opportunities to show My love while suffering great pain and I esteem highly Your treatment of Your only-begotten Son. But when you snatch from Me My life and the means whereby I can continue to suffer as I have desired up to this hour, I no longer look upon You except as a judge dealing with a criminal who deserves no consideration whatsoever."

Jesus uttered two cries of pain: one in the Garden of Olives at the beginning of His passion and the other at its end, on the cross on Calvary. The first of these was: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me"; the second: "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?" The first brought out the weakness of His human nature; the second, the power of grace. One caused horror; the other, a burning desire for crosses. The first was traceable to sufferings which exceeded natural powers; the other, to the superabundance of grace with respect to all sorts of pains. He cried out in Gethsemani because His sufferings appeared to be insupportable; on the cross He considered them to be too light. They were too heavy and they were not heavy enough.

During His agony in Gethsemani the mere thought of His bitter chalice caused Him to pale, forced Him to the ground, filled His soul with sorrow, and provoked in His body a frightful sweat of blood. But when on Calvary He had drunk the chalice which He had once proposed that the sons of Zebedee drink with Him, He cried out that He was still thirsty. In His complaint that His Father had abandoned Him while He yet desired to suffer, we see how excellent is that grace which originated and terminated in the union of a divine Person with a created nature. So great a grace produced the expected results. It

cannot be exhausted, however great the multitudes capable of sharing in it. Though their number be increased unto infinity, they can never equal his fullness. Similarly, though all imaginable torments of this life were to be increased in number and endlessly intensified, they would still fall short of assuaging His insatiable disposition to suffer.

How extraordinary that the sufferings of our Lord on the cross were, in His view, at one and the same time both insupportable and all too light. The interplay of these two contraries, which were mutually complementary and coexisted side by side in one and the same subject, left Him inconsolably afflicted. He was as much abandoned to the excess of His desires as to the weakness of His nature. If the one cried out: "No more, it is enough, or too much," the other cried out: "I thirst, it is too little, I can bear more." Too-much and too-little, surfeit and hunger, thirst and abundance joined in a single voice to utter but one cry, to direct a double complaint to the Father that He treated His only Son with a severity which conformed neither to the unquenchable dispositions of His will nor to the feeble condition of the created nature which He had divinely united to His Person.

Jesus' human nature was submerged beneath the angry billows of divine justice but His desire remained unslaked, like a man with dropsy who is plagued more by his desire for drink than by death. Abraham's servant Agar, chased from her mistress for her insolence, abandoned her child Ismael when she perceived that they had used up their water-supply. Going on her way, she said: "I cannot bear to see the child die." Jesus, however, knowing that the waters of His sufferings were exhausted, was moved to say with the mighty Samson: "Have You given

this great deliverance and victory into the hand of Your servant, that I am to die of thirst?" 2

Thirst is caused by bodily heat. The thirst of Jesus must have been the most violent ever suffered by man, in view of the circumstances that led up to it: the agony, the sweat of blood, the scourging, and the crucifixion. A burning fire devoured Him. Yet when Jesus spoke of thirst, He did not refer to a physical thirst, for He knew that He was shortly to depart this life, but He expressed His desire to suffer even more for us.

As the hour of His passion approached, Jesus had recourse to prayer, prostrating Himself on the ground and saying thrice: "Father, if it be possible, take this chalice from Me." By "chalice" He meant the bitter passion He had to suffer. But when there remained nothing more to drink from this chalice, He confessed to being thirsty.

What do You mean, Master, by such words? Before tasting the chalice You refuse it, but once You have drunk it to the dregs, You complain of thirst. Was Your chalice filled with the wine of divine joy or the wine of sadness? If with bitterness, I can understand why You asked Your Father to remove the chalice from You, although You would not deliberately refuse to drink it, for without it the salvation of man was impossible. You wished to make it perfectly clear both that the Incarnation had not robbed Your human nature of feeling and that pain was not stronger than the God-Man. And if Your thirst became even more desperate after You had drunk the chalice from which you had in persevering prayer asked to be spared, You thereby revealed to us how greatly You loved us.

We can imagine your saying: "Although the sufferings of My passion were so sharp that they caused Me to find

² Judges 15:18.

them an unsupportable burden, nevertheless My love, which is stronger than all the sufferings of the cross, bears witness that I would have suffered still more and greater torments if what I did suffer failed to show what infinite love can do." ^a

His was a devouring love and an insatiable desire. Neither thorns, nor blows of the lash, unnumbered afflictions, nor all the agony of crucifixion and abandonment by God could satisfy His love. St. John wrote that Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished by His sufferings, said: "I thirst." 4 He did not call upon angels or men to witness to it, for not understanding the abundance of His grace, they could not fully comprehend His inclination to suffering. He called upon His Father. He complained to Him that He was too quick to put an end to His opportunities to make further progress in the cross.

The Jews who had watched Him suffer with a patience which though beyond all human endurance did not fully satisfy His desire, were convinced that this remarkable result was due to something more than human power. Jesus had said to them in prophecy: "When you shall have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am He." This they had not wished to believe on seeing the spectacular miracles He had worked before their eyes.

Jesus' torments made possible the approach of death, but this unsupportable thirst of suffering was not the cause of His death. If the bodily heat necessary for the life of an animal is not kept supplied with food, it will feed upon its own substance until it destroys itself. During His life, Jesus' love for the cross had more than enough to keep it alive, but once His ordinary life had come to an end,

⁸ St. Bernard, De Passione Domini, chap. 13 (P.L. 184).

⁴ John 19:28.

⁵ Matt. 27:54.

instead of respecting His own adorable Person in the holy humanity which He had assumed, it anticipated the last disposition for death by destroying its own proper subject and realized the satisfaction it was not able to gain by many sufferings, the least of which was capable of bringing about His death.

Thus was the work of a God destroyed. Created love undid upon the cross the mystery of love which uncreated Love had wrought in the bosom of the Virgin Mary. It caused Jesus, who was born of the Holy Spirit, to die an earthly death. It destroyed the mystery of love in His assumed human nature in order to establish the empire of love in the heart of man. For Jesus is the work and the mystery of love. When Jesus was no longer in the world, when He was dead because of the very weight of His love, we perceive that this weight was satisfied by death, a satisfaction it could not obtain during His lifetime.

There is this difference between the bodily heat natural to man and the disposition of Jesus' soul: bodily heat dies with the subject whose death it helps to cause, but the inclination to the cross may well have been the cause of Jesus' death without itself coming to an end. Though it has no function now, because His sacred body can no longer be changed, it fills His adorable will with a readiness to die a thousand lives, if His own death was not more than enough to satisfy in strict justice for our offenses. Indeed, what Jesus suffered outweighed in merit the demerit of that unbridled pleasure which mankind had embraced by Adam's unfortunate sin of trying to see what he could do with that will which until then had made him like unto his Creator.

CHAPTER 16 K

The Eternal Cross

HUMAN love is ordinarily awakened and preserved by goodness, honesty, and generosity. God's love is different. He does not love us because we are good or because He can profit from our services; He loves us because He is supremely good. His love is not caused, and it is constant because He has always loved.

John, the Beloved Disciple, tells us that "Jesus, having loved His own who were in the world, loved them unto the end." He loved them because they were His, and they were His because He loved them so that they might be His. He did not love them as sources of goodness whence He might derive some consolation; they were all products of His liberality. Favors once given lead to others which mightily augment those already given. God's love means giving, and Jesus gives us more since His death than before it. His love found a new strength in His sorrowful passion which, instead of extinguishing it, increased the fire of His great charity.

Jesus hastened to His death, and Peter followed Him from afar that he might see the end.² Was it the end of life or of love, of torment or of charity? Jesus, having loved His own, loved them to the end, to the last instant

¹ John 13:1.

of His life. But He also loved them to the end of love, which has no end. Human love halts at the tomb; Christ's love found life there. He has triumphed over the tomb and has vanquished the hell which until then had despoiled the earth of its best treasures.

For some mysterious reason, Jesus desired that His heart be pierced with a lance after His death and that water and blood should come forth from the wound. St. John commented on the fact with unusual emphasis: "He that saw it hath given testimony, and His testimony is true." Though He died upon the cross, Christ's love could not die. His sacred humanity may have been broken up by the separation of His soul and body; but neither His love, nor His holy soul, nor His adorable Person ever tasted death.

His love is ever alive and His inclination to the cross, which was a consequence of it, is therefore also alive. After He had yielded up His spirit, He received one last wound which He would retain forever, along with the other four. He was born, He lived, He died, loving all the while; and when He died His love did not die. Before He died, His love urged Him toward His death. "Do quickly," He said to the traitor.4 But the love which pressed Him on toward death was vexed because death deprived Him of further suffering. His love was seemingly buried when Jesus bowed His head in death, but He then opened up the window of His heart to pour forth upon us the rich treasures hidden there and showed us the source of the love which had made Him come down from the bosom of His Father to take our miserable mortality to Himself and finally to the cross. He died while loving.

I submit that Our Lord's love for the cross had lost noth-

^{*} John 19:34-35.

⁴ John 13:27.

ing of its strength when He arose, glorious and immortal, bearing the wounds and scars of His passion. Thus He shows us His constancy in love, and although His condition has changed, He has not changed His inclination. "Handle and see," He said, "it is I Myself." If He still retains His bodily wounds, we may be sure that His glorified soul retains the same dispositions it had while He was alive. St. Paul says that a woman whose husband dies is free and does him no wrong if she then loves another. This applies equally to husbands who have lost their wives by death. Not so the love of Jesus. His feelings do not know the meaning of change, and to prove that they are always the same, He bears in heaven the wounds which His love had cost Him on earth.

Commenting on the words of Zacharias, Rupert explains that God the Father and the angels will for all eternity ask of Jesus: "What are these wounds of which You are so proud?" He will answer that He received them from His enemies in the house of them that loved Him. I venture to say that the conservation of these wounds in Christ's glorified body is no less a miracle of love than the Incarnation. These two miracles seem to go hand in hand. In His birth and death Jesus reveals the greatness of the love He bore us from the beginning, but the wounds which He has retained in His risen body show that He has loved and will always love us. He was born to die for our salvation, but He rose from the dead to change death into life and ignominy into glory.

Heaven and earth share in the love of Jesus; heaven, in its glory and earth, in the Eucharist, but neither of them is divorced from the cross. Jesus' body is really present in the Eucharist but that does not prevent the Eucharist

⁵ Luke 24:39.

from being the representation of His death. He is present there as a sacrifice, a sacrifice which perfectly recalls His precious death. Upon our altars is daily repeated, in an unbloody manner, the bloody sacrifice He offered on the cross on Calvary. He can die no more in His sacred humanity, but He has discovered a way to satisfy His inclination to death. Until the end of the world, He dies under the species of bread and of wine. Thus, Jesus' sacrifice is coterminous with the world, and since His love for the cross cannot end with time, He bears His wounds throughout eternity as unimpeachable witnesses to that inclination.

CHAPTER 17 K

The Cross and the Mystical Body

ONCE we have grasped something of the insatiable inclination of Jesus' soul toward the cross, we readily understand that those who belong to His mystical body should also share in that inclination. The more closely souls are united to Him, the greater their obligation to suffer, for it is only fitting that the members resemble their Head. St. Paul based the execution of the decree of man's predestination on this eternal truth: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son." 1

Our Lord did not wish to stamp out all the suffering; He wished it to continue until His mystical body attained the full number of the predestined and served His purpose. The Son of God came down from heaven to bring us that bodily immortality which we had lost, but He delays in giving it to us until the final resurrection, when He will destroy death forever. In the meantime, suffering and death serve His glory by testing those souls whom He has chosen for His own. It would be an anomaly of grace

¹ Rom. 8:29.

and love if those who were united as members to a thorncrowned Head should live delicate and luxurious lives.

Let us repeat that the members of the mystical body are saved by their conformity to their Head and are sanctified by the grace that is in Him as in its universal source. Thanks to His grace as Head, Jesus could satisfy the strict justice of God for the sins of the members. He contracted a loving obligation to suffer and as a result there was in Him a violent impetus bearing Him steadily toward the cross.

It is necessary that this grace cause the same inclination and exercise the same violence in the souls of the predestined; otherwise the mystical body would be divided against itself. All the parts must be in harmony with the dispositions and affections of the Head, all must feel its continual influence, although in different measures which make for order, distinction, and beauty.

Waters which flow through certain minerals retain some of their qualities and properties and produce certain effects in those who drink those waters. In like manner, grace flows from the soul of Jesus as from its fountainhead, and as it there produced a weight which drew Him toward His passion, it must necessarily produce this inclination in those to whom a share in His cross has been given.

"The charity of Christ presseth us," wrote St. Paul, for "if one died for all, then all were dead." ² If Christ's capital grace called for His death and filled Him with so powerful an inclination toward the cross, the same urgent love will appear in His chosen souls. Who can fully appreciate the grandeur of Jesus' love or weigh the force which led Him who was essentially immortal to suffer so horrible a death?

² II Cor. 5:14.

Such a love prevailed over the omnipotent God; what must be its power over mere creatures? St. Paul declares that he no longer judges according to the flesh and that if in the past he knew of Jesus according to the flesh, he knows Him so no longer.⁵ The weight which caused Christ's vehement attraction to the cross rendered the apostles wholly dead to themselves. The predestined must die to all things, no matter how pure and excellent they may be, said St. Paul, that they may live unto Him alone who died for them and rose again.⁴

Those who have been blessed by a high degree of grace are stamped with the unmistakable marks of interior and exterior crosses. "I am black but beautiful," cried the beloved. "My beauty comes from grace, my color from a grace which by its nature is a principle of suffering." She besought her companions to look not at her but upon the divine Sun of her soul who with but a single glance can make her ravishingly beautiful, or so desolate as to arouse compassion in tender hearts. "See my dearly Beloved," she says, "His perfect love means complete happiness and an abundance of miseries. That is why I am so beautiful and yet suffer from bitter trials which expose me to the scorn and the persecution of men."

Thus we are moved to adore in our good Master the two plenitudes whereby He is the Head of the Church. One is the plenitude of the essential glory and eternal happiness which are His as Head of the elect; the other is rich in pain and distress and constitutes Him the Head of those who, with the help of grace, strive heroically to make certain of their call. In both bitterness and joy Jesus communicates Himself according to the inscrutable decrees of God's counsel.

⁸ II Cor. 5:16.

⁴ II Cor. 5:15.

⁸ Cant. 1:4.

Jesus taught that there is inequality among the blessed when He said: "In my Father's house there are many mansions." This is also true in the state of pilgrimage as regards sufferings and crosses. Jesus does not distribute them to all in equal measure, for the final beatitude with which He will fill the blessed throughout eternity will correspond to the sufferings and labors He sends them in life. What David said of himself will be verified in all: "You have filled my soul with your consolations, according to the multitude of my sadnesses."

In heaven and on earth Jesus is the fullness of the predestined. He is King of men in time and in eternity. He is the Head of souls through grace both during the time of their pilgrimage and that of their reward. He fills the souls of the blessed with beatific joy, with transforming fire and godlike flame, but in this life He shoots His sharp arrows, dipped in gall and vinegar, together with the fires that lay waste. In both states He unites to Himself those souls to whom He applies the authentic marks of divine election: in heaven by communication of glory which is its goal and on earth by a judicious distribution of His sufferings without which there is no predestination. "He has predestined us to be made conformable to the image of His Son." 6

The Father proposes to us the twofold image of His Son, faithfully reflected in the life He led upon earth. His holy soul was filled with endless torrents of glory and with all kinds of vexations. In comparison with His, the trials of all men are but mere rivulets. His soul and heart were an ocean of torments into which the agonizing waters of the wrath of God were discharged, so that the prophet could say: "Great as the sea is your destruction." No

⁶ Rom. 8:29.

saint, however much he may share in glory, can ever match the dreadful sufferings Christ voluntarily endured for us. His sufferings will always surpass all the human sufferings of those on whom God wishes to exercise the severity of justice in this life or whom His goodness will lead by means of the rude exercises of His mercy.

CHAPTER 18 K

Interior Crosses

IESUS, our loving Savior, dispenses His crosses to His members in proportion to the grace which they possess or the greater perfection to which He wishes to raise them. From this unfailing principle St. Paul draws this great law: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." 1 These persecutions may be open or hidden; they may be bodily affliction or mental agony and abandonment induced by trials that afflict the spirit or tortures which destroy the flesh. These persecutions may employ wicked men as their instruments, but sometimes the faithful also, through ignorance or stupidity, are causes of pain to one another. Some trials are from the devil and some are from God Himself as the immediate cause. Some trials arise from the inward rebellion of our lower nature against reason, while others are the result of the loss of one's natural goods, such as riches or mental health. Sometimes it is one trial and sometimes it is a combination of many.

The general principle enunciated by St. Paul is universally true and suffers no exception. There has never lived a man belonging to Christ by grace and sharing in His sanctity who has not experienced persecution of one kind or another. When external crosses cease, God takes

¹ II Tim. 3:12.

care to provide him with spiritual and supernatural causes of trials. These are drawn from grace itself, not the grace of state or an ordinary grace, but grace at its best. Such souls are among the privileged, and grace uses them so to satisfy its own proper inclination.

Grace cannot be inactive; it must have something to sustain it or it will become languid and die. It is eager to grow. But it cannot receive a notable increase without the help of crosses which make it more conformed to its principle. God will abandon a soul to its own feebleness in the nudity of grace whose sensible effects He suspends. He does this deliberately, so that the soul may learn to know itself, to become detached from self, and to put its confidence in Him who alone is responsible for its good beginnings and its progress and can bring it to perfection.

If a man disposes his heart to serve God as faithfully as one of God's creatures should, the Holy Spirit will prepare his soul for the trial of that infallible touch which separates generous souls from the inconstant.² Consider that innumerable company which composes the glorious court of Jesus and those who, still in the Church Militant, strive to gain their crown by following the example of Him who, like a giant, has run without stopping.

Of all the torments which God sends either through His creatures or by Himself for the purification of souls closely associated to Him by their piety and love, those that attack only the body are not as difficult to bear as those which affect the soul. These are usually of longer duration and a higher quality. Bodily sufferings can be borne for a long time or, if they are extremely violent, they destroy their subject without too great a delay. Divine providence manifests the same wisdom in dispensing the

² Ecclus. 2:1.

torments which test the predestined as when with thousands of delights it draws those whose bodies suffer the violence which alone can satisfy the inclination of grace. But when the spirit suffers, all delight disappears. The soul cannot experience any sweetening of its pain as long as it is given over to God's displeasure, for its duration depends on the will of God alone, and the sole reason for its violence is the inscrutable counsel of God's love.

The spirit of God breathes where He will and as He will.3 This is certainly true as regards His dispensing of consolations. When it comes to the distribution of crosses, their quantity or quality or duration rest entirely upon His adorable good pleasure, which He exercises in the eternal predestination of the saints. And because life consists of good and evil, He wishes that the interior life have its hidden martyrdoms as well as those secret consolations and lights which surpass all human understanding. The other martyrs have angels and men for spectators, as St. Paul says, but these are seen only by God and by the soul to which He may deign to give some knowledge by a special revelation. The angels cannot comprehend how God becomes present in a holy soul nor can they understand the crosses or the circumstances of the sufferings that He pours forth into that soul. These things are His secrets and pertain to the hidden life. They are among those things of which God has reserved the understanding to Himself, just as He has reserved His glory to Himself alone.

In some of His works God manifests Himself; in others there is the imprint of a hidden God. The first are traceable to His providence; the second flow from that inscrutable wisdom which charts in an admirable but secret way the

⁸ John 3:8.

progress of men and angels. They fall under that providence whose limits are known only to God. The hidden life of the saints is an imitation of the hidden life of Jesus, which was infinitely greater and more full of marvels than His external life. He has left it to men as their perfect exemplar and their perfection is to reflect it faithfully.

By the hidden life of Jesus I do not mean the lonely places to which He was condemned for most of His earthly life, although in this sense also we can call Him a "hidden God." 5 St. Paul says that His adorable Incarnation was "the mystery hidden from eternity in God." 6 It was effected during the silence of the night before only two witnesses: the archangel Gabriel and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was born in a miserable stable outside the town. All His life was hidden. From His infancy to the age of twelve we see Him not. From the age of twelve to thirty we do not know what He said, what He did, or where He dwelt. Only after His baptism did He manifest Himself to the world, but even a good part of these three last years was consecrated to retreat. Not content to spend entire nights in prayer, He departed from cities, fled from crowds, and hid Himself, commanding silence upon those who admired the miraculous works He performed.

However, it is not of this hidden life that I would speak, but a more secret and interior life traceable to the Spirit of God existing in Christ's soul. His soul, personally united to the divinity, existed in the twofold state of glory and of merit. The merit was gained by the continual martyrdom resulting from the banishment of anything that might bring joy to His soul and from the constant humiliation of His soul by the keenest kind of suffering. The martyrdom of which we here speak adapts itself to the secret life which

⁵ Isa. 45:15.

is its domain. The hidden life of the saints was modelled upon the hidden life of Jesus and their interior crosses were an expression or imitation of Jesus' cross and interior martyrdom. This hidden life is fulfilled in love. In what follows we shall see that it is a "separating" love.

CHAPTER 19 K

Love's Detachment

LOVE is a movement of the will toward a beloved object; hence, those who are moved by love belong not to themselves but to the object which draws them. Thus we see that higher and universal causes are dedicated to the care of those things which depend on them, while those who are equal and of a like nature tend to mutual union. Inferior beings seek to associate with that which is necessary for their conservation and are ever turning toward those causes which are the source of their good.

This is certainly true as regards the angels. The superior angels are happily occupied with the lower angels, whom they purify, illumine, and perfect by the communication of divine lights. They do not, of course, communicate that excellence whereby they are themselves purified, illumined, and perfected, but according as the inferior angels can be influenced by them. The inferior angels are borne by the fierce ardor of their wills toward their benefactors.

By His love for His creatures and because of His goodness, God is, as it were, beside Himself with joy as He exercises His sweet providence over all things, for then He is, so to speak, softened and won by His own goodness and love.¹ From the inaccessible heights wherein He

¹ De divinis nominibus, I, 4.

dwells, He is, without going out of Himself, transported by an essentially ecstatic power and made present to His creatures. These creatures are the products of His omnipotence, which must continue to flow if the creatures are to be conserved in being.

God's omnipotence is exercised with love and is everywhere operative. It is to this divine ecstasy that we owe our very lives, our nature, our aspirations, and their fulfillment. Without Him we would be more formless than the primitive chaos. Nothingness would be our abode, and we would never be capable of enjoying by knowledge and love the glory that is infinite and eternal. O ravishing love, I owe You as much gratitude as if all Your being were confined within my being, as if all Your thought and care were centered upon me. You are not thereby divided but remain wholly Yourself and in all things, and this is because of Your immensity, which we creatures cannot imitate. Yet You are not less powerful when transported by love nor less worthy of our love, for You are all perfect and deserve our greatest admiration.

The Incarnate Word, too, knew the ecstasy of holy love. He wished to love man, to make him participate not only in His presence but in His Person as well. So closely and so intimately did He unite our nature to Himself that He assumed all of its states and all the defects to which it is subject, except those which were incompatible with His dignity as the Son of God. Since He was truly man, He was mortal and passible. Now this ecstasy remains constant, and will never end; it will belong to this nature as long as God remains an object of adoration. So persevering was it that it caused Him to be numbered among the dead and brought Him down to the gloomy dungeons of hell. His soul could indeed be separated from His body, and yet the

divine person never quitted His body as it lay in the tomb, where it was more truly the body of a God than the body of a man. Nor did God abandon His soul, which had descended into Limbo to console the holy Fathers so long detained there.

That a divine Person be hypostatically united to a living soul, even in glory, or that He be united to a body informed by such a soul, is no more astonishing than that the same uncreated Person be united to a body that was dead, devoid of life and feeling, separated from its soul and resting in the coldness of the tomb. Nor is it cause for wonder that this body, which was truly a corpse, have within itself the living God, thus proving that love is as strong as death and zeal, which is the cause of ecstasy, is as powerful as hell.

All this would be inconsequential if it did not illustrate holy love in all its workings, especially in the Eucharist. Here, until the end of time, Jesus remains for the salvation of souls in a state of ecstatic love. Ecstasy occurs when the soul withdraws its attention from the use of its senses and turns to a consideration of supernatural beauty which lifts it out of itself. Then it hears nothing and sees nothing and the vital functions of its sensitive powers seem to be suspended. It is obvious that the body of Christ is not in the Eucharist according to the laws of other bodies. Because of their quantity, the latter occupy place, whereas He is present in a way that makes Him more lovable and admirable than do any of His other works. The substance of His body does not follow the law of extension which is proper to quantity. Quite the contrary. In this Sacrament quantity is indivisible, after the manner of substance, and He is as much present in the smallest particle of the host as He is in the entire host. Christ's soul cannot exercise any vital operation here. His eyes do not perform their natural functions; His ears hear nothing; His sense of touch is inoperative. He is there in a fashion representative of His death. The Disciple whom Jesus loved says that he saw "the Lamb standing as it were slain," but He is not dead, for "Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, and death shall no more have dominion over Him." Though full of life and endowed with a soul, He does not produce the actions proper to life. He has all His lower faculties, but they are miraculously suspended so that He may be adored. He has established upon our altars the august throne of His ecstatic love and through the ages it has not been interrupted for as much as a single instant, and it will continue without interruption until the end of the world.

His love holds Him there, reduced to a state wherein He has neither being, nor life, nor presence except for us. It is a state unworthy of His greatness, but it is just what we need. He is deprived of His external glory so that He may be useful to us and may the more easily communicate to us the very source of life. In the Eucharist Jesus is without any other action but that which His creature gives Him, and there He follows the intentions and determinations of His creature, and does not sensibly perceive the dispositions and qualities of those who receive Him.

The Eucharistic Christ does not disdain either the cabins of the poor or the huts of the lepers. He does not prefer the dwellings of princes or the magnificent palaces of monarchs. Cancerous lips touch His mouth, as well as lips that rival the roses in their color and sweetness. Nothing can daunt His loving inclination to give Himself. Though trampled on by criminal feet, He is not moved.

Judas the traitor received him as wholly as did His favorite apostle. Whether He is honored or scorned, adored or cursed, praised or held in abomination, it touches Him not, so long as He can leave upon earth the device of a God who loves to the point of ecstasy, with a love whose property it is to be a separating love. "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." 4

His love is the cause of another transport, due to the plenitude of His glory which He pours into the blessed. He becomes as it were their minister, as St. Paul says.⁵ He manifests His will to them and is solicitous to be a living source of happiness to them. He reserves to Himself neither glory, nor vision of God, nor love, nor even, if I dare say it, His divine essence together with His Person. He shares it all with them for their enjoyment. His work in heaven is to minister unto us while passing by.

As a matter of fact, nothing "passes by" in eternity. The torrents of divine joy are ever undiminished, always overflowing and changeless. As they pour into the souls of the blessed, the first do not have to make place for those that follow, and the novelty of the latter will not spoil the pleasant taste of others already known. The Son of glory is not like the visible sun, which now brings sweetness and warmth to the earth and now nothing but hardship and cold by withdrawing from it.

When the beloved in the Canticle says that her Beloved is like "a roe or a young hart leaping upon the mountains and skipping over the hills," 6 she wishes to describe how He acts when He is, as it were, away from home, rather than the way He comports Himself in heaven. That Jesus in passing will serve the blessed, refers to the ecstatic power of His love, which makes Him go out of Himself to trans-

⁴ Matt. 28:20.

⁵ Heb. 8:2.

⁶ Cant. 2:8-9.

mit His love and delights into the souls He has chosen to be His companions in glory. He attaches Himself to each of them, as if others did not exist and as if His happiness depended on His sharing His own with them.

Jesus does not love those souls less which have not yet attained to this joy than He does those who now peacefully enjoy it; for both He exercises the same transporting charity. He is the fulfillment of happiness for the blessed and He helps others toward that goal. All His care and planning tend to the glory of the blessed, yet He lays plans for the salvation of the others. Everything that God does in us is aimed at raising our soul up to imitate Him as best it can.

God's graces, communications, and operations are dispensed in such a way as to detach us from ourselves and from all created things, so that without the admixture of any impurity we may unite ourselves perfectly to Him. His love does not penetrate our hearts to remain there inactive or as a simple static perfection; it is given so that, with His help, we may raise up our minds to its living source, the supreme holiness which is God.

It should now be clear that this love is a principle of separation in those in whom it has free rein. If they share in the favors of privileged souls, it is not for their enjoyment alone, but that they may learn that love is the cause of death in him who loves and a principle of life in him who is loved. This is characteristic of all types of love and especially in one who has great charity, because the spirit touched by love has no life or happiness except in its principle and in that happy death of which the Apostle spoke when he said: "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Jesus, in God."

CHAPTER 20 K

Death Through Love

GOD wisely ordained that the inclination to the cross in Jesus' soul was not completely frustrated of its purpose even after He sat in glory at His right hand. Until the last moment of time He desires that it be exercised in His mystical body into which, as Head, Jesus pours grace. This grace being of the same nature in the Head as in the members, it imposes the same loving weight upon all who receive it. With this in mind St. Paul declared that the love of God caused the predestined to die to all things, to live only in Him who had of His own free will died for them.¹

Elsewhere St. Paul wrote: "You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." ² But this Christ was full of opprobrium, not majesty; not crowned with glory, but filled with misery; not a living source of consolation, but a profound abyss of unbearable sorrows. Our life is hid with Christ in God; with Christ, not as giving but as depriving, not as terminating His love in our bosom, but taking away our love from our hearts and separating us from our own pleasure. "You are dead," says St. Paul, "and your death is not without life, although this life is a secret and a hidden one. For although your love is a principle of

¹ II Cor. 5:14.

detachment, it has still for its end that sovereign union or that divine unity which Christ sought for us from the Father toward the end of His last discourse in the Cenacle." His words initiated this sublime separation from all consolation: "Holy Father, for them do I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified." *

Our Lord did not refer to a habitual, inward sanctification, for as He contains in Himself the plenitude of this grace, He is not to be numbered with those spoken of by the angel in the Apocalypse: "He that is just, let him be justified still, and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still." 4 Nor is there any question of a legal sanctification which consisted in ablutions, fastings, and ceremonies designed to cleanse from moral stain. Such stains may not have touched the soul, but they were at least considered to do so by the Law which He had come not to destroy but to fulfill. Then too, that sort of sanctification profited only the one who had incurred legal stain. Christ spoke of quite a different kind of sanctification. The Scriptures often use the word "sanctification" to mean a separation from something. Jeremias asks the Lord to sanctify, that is, set apart, separate the wicked for "the day of slaughter." 5 In like manner the faithful were sanctified by Nehemias when he separated them from their idolatrous wives, and the day on which that separation took place was called a day of sanctification.6

And yet not every separation is a sanctification. It is true that there can be no sanctification without a separation from everything that is not God and His essential holiness. Dionysius tells us that holiness is a detachment or a separation from everything that is impure, inferior, base, or vile.

⁸ John 17:11, 19.

⁵ Jer. 12:3.

⁴ Apoc. 22:11.

⁶ II Esd. 12 and 13.

He wisely concludes that only God is perfectly holy because His being and operation are infinitely elevated above all things dependent upon Him. He does not contract any stain or ungodlike quality. He is in all things and He is all things, and yet He remains far-removed from all things.

None of God's attributes can compare with His holiness. All the divine perfections are, in the immensity of God, equal, being identified with God and His holiness; but whereas the other attributes of God have in some way a relation to creatures, His holiness sets Him entirely apart from them. God is the more holy as He is absolutely separated, and His holiness raises our minds to a more profound knowledge and a more perfect imitation of His divinity.

Love is perfect in proportion as it resembles that of Christ. Jesus' love is absolutely perfect because He is the perfect imitation of the love of His Father. Human love is great in proportion as it prepares for and leads to a more intimate union, and union is closest and most intimate when there is in it the greatest separation from everything that does not direct our love to God. The same love is therefore at one and the same time a principle of life and a principle of death. It unites and separates, gathers and isolates; it is near, yet distant, it detaches and is a cause of intimacy. God's holiness is communicated to His creatures, but before making them entirely conformed to Him, it first produces in them a general privation of everything incompatible with His immaculate purity. "You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Sin is the enemy of grace and the cause of death to the soul. As grace is a sharing in the life of God, a soul dies when it opens the door to sin. But there is another and different death wherein grace expels sin from a soul given

over to it. St. Paul spoke of this when he said: "So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin." The justice of God can produce a death in a soul which Scripture calls the second death; this death rules in hell over spirits confirmed in evil. But there is another death caused by the holiness of God within the souls of those whom it possesses, and to these we may say: "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." *

A theologian who studies so that he may adore the infinite perfection of God and not merely to satisfy his curiosity will discern two kinds of sanctity which in God are but one eminent perfection. The first of these is called natural holiness and it is infinitely perfect, above all beings, transcending everything that is or can be created. In its presence not even the highest of the angels are without stain, for they are deeply rooted in nothingness, in which they share more than they do in being. Hence Dionysius says that God dwells in both light and in darkness. In light, because of His great purity; in darkness, because the infinite elevation of His sanctity makes it inaccessible to creatures.

God lives in an incomprehensible purity; rather, He is Himself a most immaculate and immense purity, free from the slightest shadow of imperfection, without admixture or composition, and wholly set apart from nothingness. He is the sovereign, the necessary, and superessential being, and He is free of defects which take their rise from non-being, over which He rules as a master, contracting nothing of the imperfection that necessarily belongs to things dependent upon His loving providence. On the contrary, He unceasingly draws all things to Himself from that nothingness, to give them their particular

⁷ Rom. 6:11.

⁸ Apoc. 20:6.

⁹ Col. 3:3.

share of that which He is. Because He is being by His very nature, He is also the source of all purity and sanctity.

The chief function of that part of providence which concerns the eternal predestination of men and of angels is to convert these beings, to detach them from themselves, and to bring them out from all that is not God. Thus, imitating His sanctity, they become holy even as He is holy. God is the original holiness; just as His being is the source of all beings, He is the original fount and principle of all holiness. His holiness is the fundamental source of the holiness of men and angels, of that ravishing purity which lends such beauty to the Church Militant and Triumphant.

The second type of holiness we call a holiness of manners. It consists in the loving adherence and union of the will to what is holy and perfect, for the greater the perfection and the more infinite and embracing the love, the more elevated this habitual holiness. Now God is all-pure with an absolute and universal perfection. All perfection resides in the immensity of the divine being as in its original source. From it flow all the causes of holiness which redound to souls that imitate it in some particular perfection of justice. God is immaculate and genuine purity without mixture and free from all alloy, and as He cannot enter into a more excellent or higher and more intimate union with His goodness than that which He has by His knowledge and love, we must say that He is perfect habitual holiness just as He is essential holiness

Now the death of which St. Paul spoke when he said "You are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God," is not caused by God's essential holiness, but by imitating His habitual holiness. We know that He knows and loves nothing but Himself, in Himself, and for Himself. His

holiness separates him from all other things. It lives and operates in Him and for Him alone. Those who are disposed by love to share in His holiness should become worthy of it and reflect its very complexion by dying to all that is opposed to the life God would produce in them.

What a wonderful death, opening the door to a life of ecstasy. And how glorious, for in it the soul dies of love and bids a last farewell to creatures! Death full of blessing, one which snatches away life, only to keep it the more, because now it is hidden with Christ in God. It is not a sterile death, as other deaths are, but divinely fruitful, for it is the source of a life which becomes like that of Jesus and is united to His life to be carried with Him into the very life of God where a new birth awaits it. This death does not mean the end of natural life nor of supernatural life. Nor is it without that kind of supernatural life of love which is dynamic and never idle, in imitation of the uncreated holiness of God. It is a death that has more of presence than of absence about it, more of union than of separation. Yet it is more cruel than the death that is the common necessity of nature. In a way, this death is as unbearable as the death which a vengeful justice exercises in hell. It brings horror and fears with it and a deep desolation of soul. But as they know the properties of divine love and the goal pursued throughout these trials, holy souls would not exchange their exacting martyrdom, even for a moment, for all the delights of paradise.

CHAPTER 21 K

Love Rejected

GOD the Father gave us His Son incarnate to be the efficient, exemplary and meritorious cause of our holiness. As we read in St. John,¹ He sanctified Himself so that we might be truly sanctified. Christ might have said: "My holiness, which is the source of life to Me in My eternal procession, is in My temporal generation the cause of My death. That which is a source of delight in the nature I have received from My Father, is a principle of suffering and of the cross in the nature I have received from My Mother. The immaculate purity which I possess as God and the holiness which assures Me of all honor and delight as the only Son of Heaven, also has the power to banish all joy from my heart. It fills the inferior part of My soul with all the anguish and suffering of My earthly sojourn."

Desolate souls, think of Christ's sanctification and His subsequent separation! He was abandoned by His disciples,² His good friend St. Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him, and He was obliged to leave His immaculate Mother at the foot of the cross. When He was lifted up from the earth, the sun held back its rays, the air was filled with darkness, the earth trembled, and rocks were split in two. The angels abandoned Him to the furious cruelty of

¹ John 17:19.

His enemies and the demons did their best to augment His pains. He was a Son without a Father, a God without God, a child without His Mother!

To understand this kind of sanctification, we must suppose that Jesus' life on earth was under the government of divine providence, which is especially manifested by mercy and justice. God cannot communicate Himself more liberally to a creature than by giving it the joys of uncreated grace and uniting it to a divine person in such wise that this divine Person is the principle of all the actions of the created human nature. It is further necessary that justice make itself felt in that nature, to a degree corresponding with the grace so mercifully communicated to it.

The first Person of the Trinity was the Father of Jesus on the cross as well as within His bosom. Jesus in glory is not more His Son than during His passion. But in eternity He is so perfectly the Son of His Father that the first Person is not God over the Second and the title of Father does not give Him any pre-eminence over the Person of Him whom He engenders. For in the adorable Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, although there is production, procession, principle, term, generation, and spiration; there is no cause and effect, no superiority and inferiority, no adorer and adored. The Father, from the point of view of His uncreated paternity, has no authority over the Person of His Son as regards the effects of His justice, any more than He has as regards His mercy.

But since it pleased the Word to assume an alien nature, He was in that respect a dependent being. He was equal, but He now becomes unequal, without losing anything of His perfect equality. A sovereign, He takes the state of an inferior; a lord, He becomes a slave. He is at once both adored and adorer, subject and monarch. The Eternal Father, who heretofore was only His Father, without the divine paternity making Him superior to His glorious Son, began to assume this quality over His Son in His human nature. From now on the Son becomes an object of His mercy and a subject of His justice. He obeys the laws of divine government and suffers His divine Sonship to be buried beneath the humble condition of His state of servitude. Thus we are to understand St. Paul's declaration that "Jesus, being in the form of God, emptied Himself." He did not empty Himself of His divinity nor of His divine Person, for He is immutable and eternal.

This calls for explanation. The Father is equal to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Considered in His divine nature and person, the Son is equal to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is perfectly equal to both the Father and the Son. But in becoming man and taking His place among creatures, the Son falls under the rules of providence. Thus, inequality was joined to equality. On the one hand, Jesus is the consubstantial Son; on the other, He is servant in an alien nature. He is a sovereign, but He is also a dependent. He is God and He is man, immortal and mortal. He bears the glorious marks of absolute sovereignty, but puts on the marks of slavery. Hence, while He loses nothing of His original equality, He takes upon Himself inequality, and it can be said of Him-but not of the other two Persons-that He is equal to them as He is unequal to them in the incomprehensible mystery of the Incarnation.

The coming of the Son of God into the world is quite different from His exit from it. One is full of mercy, the other is full of justice. In the one, the plenitude of divinity is revealed; in the other, the privation of the consolations of God's presence. In the one, God's magnificence establishes Jesus in a divine and human nature; in the other, His justice tends to annihilate it in the created nature. Never has there been anyone upon whom the grace of God was so liberally poured out; nor has there ever been anyone wherein God's wrath was more rigorously exercised.

The heavenly Father is the God of His Son incarnate both by mercy and by justice. But there is a difference. By His mercy He treats Christ as His Child, so that Jesus, throughout all His life and His death, calls Him "Father," even when cruelly stretched out upon the cross.³ But when He manifests Himself as a judge and hides His quality of Father, then Jesus will not call upon Him as His Father, but as His God. And not only as His God, but as a God exercising the most severe justice ever demanded of anyone! It was as if He had cried out: "Judge, Judge, why have You abandoned Me?" ⁴

This abandonment made Jesus strictly dependent upon God, because never was there any creature who was so much a creature as Christ was in the human nature He assumed, or upon which God had exercised all that He could upon His creature to show that He was its absolute Master and God. We are constrained to confess that all beings whom He commands are as nothing in comparison to Jesus. He was, in His order, a world and a universe more glorious than the most excellent of the Father's works. He was enriched with the most charming beauty of nature and grace. At the same time, we must conclude that there never was nor will be a subject upon whom God's justice was poured forth with such severity.

The Father made use of executioners and demons to

^{* &}quot;Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

⁴ Mark 15:34.

bring about the death of His Son, but He alone was the immediate cause of His inner suffering. For this He will have no other agent of justice than Himself. Thus was the figure of Isaac fulfilled, for neither was he to have any executioner other than his own father, Abraham,⁵ who was constrained to set aside all his paternal love to play the part of executioner and thus represent the Eternal Father who accomplished in reality what Abraham was prepared to carry out only in figure.⁶

O heavenly Father, You gave Your servant Job over to Satan when You forbade him to touch his life or his soul ⁷ because You had reserved for Yourself all the good of this holy prophet. But when You have delivered Your Son to the hands of Satan, You do not wish to spare even His soul. Jesus does not complain about the external evils inflicted upon Him by creatures of the earth and of hell; only when He sees Himself under the all-powerful hand of His Father's justice does He cry out that the combat is unequal and makes public confession of His weakness. He is afraid, He languishes, He grows pale, and is sad even unto death. To reveal the extent of His sorrow, He cried out on the Cross: "Judge, Judge, why have You abandoned Me?"

No infant was ever so beloved as Jesus was by His Father. No child was ever more united to his principle than He, by choice, necessity, and love. That is why His divine Father was pleased to give Himself to Jesus by all the modes of communication He could use with His creatures. As He flooded the upper part of His soul with a joy suitable to the natural Son of God, He flooded the inferior part of His soul with a severity that was measured by the infinity of the Person on whom it was inflicted.

⁶ Gen. 22.

⁶ Heb. 11:19.

⁷ Job 2:6.

Under the figure of the prodigal son,⁸ the sinner was welcomed by his father without being punished. One who had merited the dungeon is pressed against his father's bosom in a tender and loving embrace. But the contrary was true in the case of Jesus, from whom His Father hid all his benevolence so that He might experience the full severity of divine justice.

Let us adore the soul of Jesus in the hands of the Father, hands filled with cruel desolation, without admixture of consolation. He is treated, not as a child, but as a stranger in His own home; not as an innocent one nor as the cause of innocence in men and angels, but as if He has in His own person committed all the horrible crimes of those whose nature He had assumed. The Father chastises Him as one who had to pay to divine justice a satisfaction which surpassed all the crimes men had committed against the divine Majesty.

⁸ Luke 15.

CHAPTER 22 K

Love's Annihilation

THE prophet Elias is one of the great Scriptural figures of the Holy Spirit because of the fiery chariot which bore him miraculously into the air before he could experience death. The end of his life corresponded perfectly to his infancy, when angels took him from his swaddling clothes and, as it seemed to his father Sobac, plunged him into burning coals and gave him fire to eat. When the Jews heard Jesus call upon God in the midst of His sufferings, they thought He was calling upon Elias, and they said to one another: "Stay, let us see if Elias comes to take Him down." Who doubts that Jesus had reason to complain, when the Holy Spirit, who is Love in Person and the fountain of delights toward others, suspended these delights at a moment when Christ needed them most?

O adorable Spirit, will you be for Christ, who is one of the eternal principles of Your life, the cause of His death in time? Will you be for Him a cause of privation, when with the Father He is the source of your spiration? He produces You in love, and You cause Him to feel the distressing displeasure of love. After having given Him being, You take it away amid the cruel agonies of this love, when with His Father He wondrously breathes You forth

¹ Mark 15:35.

in an eternity of uncreated glory. Having led Him into the desert to fast for forty days and nights and having charged Him with so many painful tasks, must You now fill up His miseries by crucifying Him? St. Paul speaks in this vein when he says that Jesus "by the Holy Ghost, offered Himself unspotted unto God." ² Was it not enough that You had Him nailed to the cross hand and foot? Did You have to afflict Him in His soul by a still more terrible cross, namely, the suspension of those consolations which You owe Him as the Son of God?

One cannot conceive of a loftier union than that of the three divine Persons in one and the same nature. It is rather an incomprehensible unity than a perfect union. God's only Son is united to the Father in an absolute identity of nature and a separation from everything that is not God. God wished, therefore, that Christ's human nature, raised to the dignity of a natural Son of God, should be separated from all affection and attachment to anything that is not God. We see from this that Jesus' love could not tolerate alloy, just as His sonship could not admit of any other subsistence. St. Paul remarks that Jesus did not please Himself.3 The rich treasures of His knowledge did not satisfy Him; He did not want the plenitude of His grace to fill His soul with joy: He refused the delight inseparable from the joys of glory and preferred the confusion of the cross, which dominated one part of His soul while the other was in possession of beatitude. The miracles and wonders which moved men to admiration aroused no echo of complacency in His heart.

Let us listen to what St. Paul has to say of this. "Jesus, being in the form of God humbled Himself, becoming

² Heb. 9:14.

obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." ⁴ He preferred this to the splendor of that dignity which was His by reason of His eternal filiation. He wished to hide this dignity under the terrible sufferings of His passion and death. His own will died lovingly through obedience to the will of another. His obedience was all the greater because He allowed Himself to be led against all instinct and natural disposition. The will naturally moves toward the preservation of life and the quest for honor. Jesus was so obedient that He deliberately set aside both of them.

The life Jesus lost was not simply the life of a man, but the life of a Man-God. By the loss of this life, the universe was left without its true Phoenix, because there was no longer any Jesus either in heaven or on earth while His body lay dead for three days and His soul was in limbo. For although the divine Person never abandoned the body of Christ, Jesus was no longer a man. Once His soul was separated from His body He ceased to be Jesus, for He was no longer a man. The upheaval of the universe at the death of Jesus is not so amazing when we consider what nature lost at the death of its King. Magdalen's tears are understandable enough, for He who was more than her own life to her, is, for a while, numbered among the things that are not.

In losing His life, Jesus wished also to risk His honor, for His death was accompanied by ignominy as well as cruelty. The cross upon which He willed to die aroused derision in the onlookers, for they considered those condemned to die upon the cross as more cursed than wretched. Not only did the wise men of the world look upon the victims of the cross as cursed, but we read in Scripture of a malediction against him who hangs upon

⁴ Phil. 2:6-7.

the tree.⁵ Following these words inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul draws the conclusion that Jesus was cursed and made a curse for us.⁶ From this point of view, His death was "unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness." ⁷

Dear God, what an annihilation. He suffered in an ecclesiastical and in a civil court, accused by an envy swollen by malice. His enemies accused Him of being a blasphemer and a disturber of the public peace. He was accused of rebellion against Caesar and of having projected and attempted a criminal assault upon the empire by His insolent ambition. He was accused of being an atheist; worse still, of attributing divinity to Himself, making Himself God. And as if He were the most vicious man in the world, He was declared guilty of divine *lèse-majesté* by the high priest who, tearing his garments, indicated that he thought Jesus to be insupportable to the world.

In comparison with Christ, all sorts of criminals were worthy of pardon. Murderers and robbers were declared innocent, not He! Men thought to render a great service to God by importuning the authorities to rid the world of this monster of wickedness and they treated Him as if He were mad.8

His sufferings were augmented by men who feared God, who showed their mercy by asking for the release of a prisoner, but were so religious that they did not wish to break the law by entering into a praetorium.

Finally, all divine, heavenly, human, and diabolical powers joined together to consummate the work. And to climax His abandonment, He desired to be an instrument of martyrdom to Himself. Being equal to God, He could

⁵ Deut. 21:23.

⁶ Gal. 3:13.

⁷ I Cor. 1:23.

⁸ Mark 3:21.

with no trace of vanity, have been glorified; instead, He emptied Himself of all thought of His hidden honor, to hold His mind concentrated on the ignominy of His cross. Thus did He establish the separation which we are to imitate. "For them do I sanctify myself," He said to the Father, "that they also may be sanctified," and He adds at once the reason for this sanctification: "that they may be one in Us, as Thou Father, in Me, and I in Thee." 9

⁹ John 17:19.

CHAPTER 23 K

Orphans Through Love

BOTH in this life and in the next, perfection consists in the imitation of God's holiness. For all eternity the angels and the blessed will sing no other song of praise than "Holy, holy, holy," adding the phrase: "Lord God of Sabaoth" or "armies," as if He were a God of trials or a God who separates. In this sense also, Christ had declared that He came not to bring peace upon earth, but the sword; to set a man against his father and the daughter against her mother.1 His sermons and His whole life were a continual lesson to take up the cross and carry it, to follow Him in the all-embracing separation which He professed throughout His lifetime. He also said that the man who did not renounce everything he possessed and who did not abandon everything, even his life, was not worthy of Him. Tirelessly He preached abnegation and renunciation, not only of superficial things, but even of necessary things, whenever these would be an obstacle to perfect union with the supreme good. "If your right hand scandalize you, cut it off and cast it from you; if your right eye scandalize you, pluck it out and cast it from you." 2 At times Christ even counselled the renunciation of supernatural graces, however pure and extraordinary, if self-love were to seek in

¹ Matt. 10:34.

them the sensible satisfactions which are opposed to the perfect purity demanded by God.

So universal is this truth that I find no exception to it among those creatures who share in God's holiness. Their perfection consists in an absolute purity of affection toward God. He does not want them to love anything that may lead to Him if that love would hinder the progress of the will, for that would be to substitute the means for the end and mere helps for the finished perfection. Not even the angels and saints are to be loved, if in loving them, one were to turn from Him who deserves to be loved above all things. Thus, the angels at the tomb of the risen Christ made no great impression on Magdalen because she did not find among them Him whom she was seeking. Small wonder that she turned her back on them, as St. John tells us.3 One should not criticize these statements as extravagant, since Jesus Himself told a man who addressed Him as "Good Master" that "None is good but one, that is, God." 4

God desires to be loved in a way that befits the sovereign holiness which sets Him apart from all things. He lives and reigns in an immaculate purity proper to Himself and He desires to be loved by those whose affections have the same characteristics, that is, by souls detached from all that is not God and by hearts and wills emptied of all attachment to creatures, however pure and holy they may be. Thus we see that the favors which God sends us are not to be loved in themselves, but only so far as they lift us to their source and serve the purpose for which they have been given to us. Thus, the angels in their heavenly hierarchies do not consider God as one who purifies, illumines, and perfects their intellects, but they consider

⁸ John 20:14.

⁴ Mark 10:18.

Him the end, the term, and the perfection of all such acts. The acts themselves are only means, they are not the good which constitutes their perfect happiness.

You Yourself, Lord, taught this truth to the apostles, when You said: "If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you." ⁵ Elevated though they may have been in grace, You taught them to strive for a still greater sanctity. And if sanctity implies separation and detachment, they had to endure the most exacting separation possible in this life for a soul which loves and is loved by You.

Christ's visible presence, His conversation, His sermons, His bearing, and His actions made a tremendous impression on the apostles. St. John Chrysostom says there was in His eyes a divine charm that drew the two sons of Zebedee away from their father to follow Him. They had not yet seen Jesus do anything that would make Him, in their judgment, greater than their father. St. Peter said to Christ: "Thou hast the words of eternal life," 6 and His words were indeed such for all those who were blessed to hear them. A power went forth from Him. It cured every kind of sickness and was more efficacious for the souls of the afflicted than it was for their bodies. What, then, are we to think of the effect of His soul upon the men to whom He confided the deepest secrets of His divine plan for our salvation? Sadness could not long persist in their hearts, once they had raised their eyes to the face which fills the desires of the angels and satisfies even the love of the seraphim.

More than this, it was perfectly fitting that the apostles should cherish tenderly this loving favor, one without parallel among the graces which heaven pours forth upon souls. Could any affection be more detached from creatures

⁵ John 16:7.

than the one which derives from purity itself? What is more reasonable than to try to preserve a consolation which contains every cause for ecstasy? And yet Jesus judged that His presence was incompatible with the perfection of holy love. He knew that His disciples would never acquire the holiness demanded by their ministry and that they would never attain the purity of love which their vocation required unless He separated Himself from them. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus, astonished that they had not recognized Him sooner by the sensible effects which were the ordinary result of His presence, said to one another: "What were we thinking of? Were not our hearts burning within us whilst He spoke on the way and opened to us the Scriptures?" ⁷

Knowing that His apostles would stop with Him rather than press onward toward the end for which He had come into the world and that they would consequently not attain to the holiness of love which is concomitant with the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus warned them that if they did not give up what they loved, they would not receive what they desired. "You desire Jesus, but you will not have Him unless you lose Him. You will not desire God for Himself unless you separate yourselves from God in yourselves. If I go not away, the Holy Spirit will not come." In other words, they must offer up Jesus so that the Holy Spirit will be sent to them. When that Spirit gives Himself to them, He will also give them Jesus to be loved. St. Paul puts it: "The charity of Christ presses us; judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead. . . . Wherefore henceforth we know no man according to the flesh. And if we have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know Him so no longer." 8

⁷ Luke 24:32.

⁸ II Cor. 5:14.

St. Paul did not say that he no longer knew Jesus but that he no longer knew Him according to the flesh. Once the Holy Spirit was communicated to his soul, St. Paul loved Christ in the way that true love demanded. He described the holy love in his soul as a love of restraint, one that separated, a tyrannical, violent love that detaches from Jesus Himself. His was a love that made him die to Jesus so that he might live to Jesus; it detached from Jesus only to be a more effective cause of union with Him.

To say that the apostles loved only Jesus' humanity would be to belittle the public confession of faith made by St. Peter in the name of all, namely, that Jesus was the Son of the living God. They avowed that the generation of Jesus was not simply a human birth, but the birth of a God-Man. Hence, the worship rendered to Christ was, in the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, "theanthropolatry," not "anthropolatry," that is, adoration of a Man-God, not of an ordinary man. Their love for Him had to correspond to their faith and adoration, and hence the object of their love was the divine Person subsisting in His sacred Humanity.

When Jesus said, "If I do not go away the Holy Spirit will not come to you," He wished to teach His apostles how this separating love leads a soul to concentrate upon God alone. It loves Him not as One who gives, but as One who rejoices. The soul unites itself to Him because He is all-sufficient in Himself, not because the soul finds Him a source of pleasure. The soul does not love Him because He takes care of it or because He is good to it or because He fills it with joy; rather, it loves Him because of His universal perfection, and this is the very foundation of eternal happiness for the soul. To attain this eminent holiness, the soul loses God in order to find Him and leaves

Jesus in order to reach Him. It loses knowledge of Him according to the flesh, in order to gain it according to the spirit. It separates itself from Him as regards the love of concupiscence, to enjoy Him by the love of friendship.

The apostles loved Jesus as God, but because they were drawn to Him more for the consolations that stemmed from His visible presence than for the perfection which He possessed in Himself, He told them that His presence was incompatible with true love and that the Holy Spirit alone could teach them how to love. As St. John says, the presence of the Son delays the coming of the Holy Spirit: "For as yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." 9 The reason for this is that the pleasure of the Father in His well-beloved Son stems from the fact that the Father loves the Son as a perfection and as a principle of an uncreated good. As a perfection, because He is the perfect term produced by the Father; as a principle, because together with the Father He produces the Holy Spirit. The pleasure which the apostles took in their Master while He was on earth was concerned more with the streams than with the source. They loved the end only because of the means to the end; they loved the use of a thing rather than using things so as to attain to happiness. Instead of being with God, they wished that God be with them. Thus, although the pleasure which the apostles enjoyed in Christ emanated from a source that was purity itself, it was nevertheless an obstacle to the perfect communication of the Holy Spirit, who is pure Love. Without this Spirit they could not love God as He deserves to be loved. But the Holy Spirit was to be for them the principle and cause of love. Jesus explicitly said as much: "If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will

⁹ John 7:37.

send Him to you." It was such a love that He demanded of St. Peter in particular, and in order to arouse it in his heart, He asked him three times after His resurrection: "Simon Peter, do you love Me?" 10 St. Peter was saddened at this repetition, as if the love which does not lead to death and the cross were unworthy of the saints; as if the love by which the apostle had manifested his loyalty had not yet reached the sublime sanctity required of the Head of the Church. Jesus asked of Peter a love that saddens and He would not stop asking him until He had induced into his soul that lofty isolation in which God wishes to be loved above all things.

¹⁰ John 21:17.

CHAPTER 24 K

The Mother of God

ST. PAUL wrote to the Corinthians ¹ that no man can lay any other foundation save that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. That is why the grace of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was measured by her cross. The magnitude of her love was the norm of her holiness and her sanctity corresponded to her "separation." The Holy Spirit has shown us that Jesus' grace was the principle of the cross both in His natural and in His mystical Person. His love had something isolating about it. The greater one's grace and the more intense his love for Jesus, the more faithfully he shares in Christ's plenitude and the more imperiously is he disposed to suffering and the harshest kind of separation and detachment.

Following this principle, we shall understand Mary's martyrdom, holiness, and consecration, in the proportion that we penetrate into her great grace and profound charity.

In the order of grace, Mary is a remarkable work. In a manner of speaking she exhausts the omnipotence of God. He has made her such that, apart from Christ, He cannot produce another creature more excellent than her who by reason of her divine maternity participates in the hypostatic union. She seems to have been humbly aware of this when

¹ I Cor. 3:11.

she sang in her Magnificat: "He that is mighty has done great things to me." Of course, even with His infinite power God cannot produce an effect that is wholly infinite, but in His sovereign wisdom He executes, not everything that He can, but everything that He judges fitting. Although in the production of the divine Word the Father begets a Son, He does not produce an effect, but an infinite term, because He operates in a manner proper to His divine nature. Where creatures are concerned, His effect is always finite, for He operates in accordance with the rules of His divine art.

Mary is doubly related to God as a creature and as a mother. Considered as a creature, God was free not to create her. He could have wished not to be born of a mother by way of human generation. On the other hand, He wished to have a mother, and it was not fitting that He produce her without endowing her with all the graces she needed in view of her dignity as the Mother of God.

Because of her divine maternity, therefore, Mary was not only a heavenly prodigy but a miracle in the order of miracles. Natural effects proceed from God and resemble Him in some way, but the resemblance is so imperfect and so faint that a man's portrait on canvas has a greater resemblance to him whom it represents than created things have to their Creator. But through grace, charity, and glory, supernatural creatures such as men and angels look upon God not as their Maker but as their Father. As a living man is superior to a painting of a man, grace elevates him above the entire natural order.

Now the hypostatic union is something far above the natural order, and by her maternity Mary entered into that divine order. It is true to say that in the order of grace she surpasses all others.

Here in truth is an admirable thread running through the orders of nature and grace and the hypostatic union. As in the natural order a living man is superior to the man in a portrait, as grace is above nature, and as Jesus is far superior to Mary in the hypostatic order, so Mary is above the common order of grace. But there is this difference: in the order of personal union Jesus surpasses His Mother with an infinitely greater splendor than that which raises her maternity above the common order of grace.

Let us look further into this. Natural things imitate God in their being, their life, and their intelligence so far as, in an analogous way, these things are common to God and His creatures. Men and angels, however, participate in supernatural being in a divine manner, for being, life, and reason belong properly to God alone, inasmuch as He is superior to all nature and is in Himself the sovereign good. Moreover, He is unshareable; He forms no part of any created substance, not even of those who are drawn by grace into the family of God and raised to divine life.

But Mary, the Mother of God, entered into the supernatural state in an eminent way not granted to any other creature. Not that she became God, but that she became the mother, in His human nature, of Him who is God by nature. Her position calls for a special honor from men and angels, an honor less than that which they owe to God, yet surpassing the reverence they show to persons less than God, for Mary constitutes an order all by herself somewhere between God by nature and God by participation.

Jesus is God by nature in His divine Person; so far as they share in God's nature, the saints and angels are gods by adoption. It follows then that Mary is God by affinity, since the bonds which make her His Mother touch the borders of divinity. This is sound theology, based on the

message of the archangel² and confirmed by the decrees of the holy Councils which declare Mary to be the Mother of God.

Ordinary grace makes us adopted children, but Mary's singular grace resulted in her kinship with God. Ordinary grace can tolerate an infinite number of recipients, but the grace proper to the Mother of God is hers alone. In the divine nature there is but one God; in the hypostatic union there is but one divine Person; likewise, in the order of affinity with God, there is only one Mary. One God alone fills and exhausts the infinite, immense, eternal, and omnipotent capacity of the divine essence. One divine Person alone effects the term of the hypostatic union. And Mary fills the entire range of divine kinship, which far surpasses the grace given to men and angels.

We adore one God in His divine nature; we honor with supreme cult one uncreated Person in two natures; and we revere, but with a lesser cult, this one human creature in her awesome affinity to God. In paying Mary the honor that is due her, we do not exempt her from divine adoption. Quite the contrary. We cannot deny that she was God's adopted daughter, and we must proclaim her to be the Mother of God. As an adopted daughter she was predestined to grace and glory; being related to God she was predestined to be the Mother of God. As an adopted daughter, she had the grace of adoption in all its original fullness. The grace in Jesus' holy soul was not a grace of adoption, but grace was there, nevertheless, as in its universal and original cause; Mary's grace was only a brooklet flowing from that infinite source. If, however, Mary's grace be considered from the viewpoint of her admirable kinship with her Son, it was merely an ornament added to that

² Luke 1:35.

maternal dignity from which all her other perfections flowed. Thus she is, next to Christ, the object of our acts of religion, rather than someone we can imitate.

Jesus Christ was so perfect a recipient of grace that adoption, the effect proper to grace, was, as it were, hindered in Him. That effect was forestalled by His natural sonship. When the sun shines, the stars hide and the moon does not shine. What I am trying to say is that natural and adopted sonship are incompatible in one and the same subject,³ even if the grace of union, which is the cause of Christ's natural sonship, is not contrary to the habitual grace which is the cause of adoptive sonship in all other men. The grace of personal union and habitual grace were like an elder and a younger son, as the spring and the stream, as the sun and its rays, and they were perfectly coupled in the sacred humanity of Jesus. But these two sonships produced by grace cannot abide one another, the lesser of them must yield to the greater.

The light of the moon cannot remain unless the sun continues to shine, filling it with light, even though the moon gives no light in the presence of the sun. The moon continues to be enlightened, but in the presence of a greater light which is the cause of its splendor, it does not shine. So too, habitual grace drew its infinity from the plenitude of that uncreated grace in the soul of Jesus to which it was united as to the source of its perfection. But it could never produce the effect of adoption, because adoptive sonship was absorbed by the splendors of natural sonship.

Mary is first in grace after her Son, but grace in her did not encounter the same obstacle or incompatibility that it did in her Son as regards the effect of adoption. Mary was,

⁸ Summa theol., IIIa, q.23, a.4.

in grace, God's first adopted daughter. She was not, however, the first in the filiation by grace; that belongs to her Son, for St. John speaks of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace.⁴ Nor was Mary the first in the primary source of the grace of adoption. She received from her Son the name of child, as adopted children do, and also a unique participation in the primacy of filiation which distinguishes the natural son from other children. Not that she was God's natural daughter, as He was God's natural Son, but that, due proportion being observed, she was the first adopted daughter in the order of grace as He was the first and only natural Son in grace, of which He is the uncreated and ever-flowing source.

It is two different things to speak of being the primary source of the grace of adoption and being first in adopted sonship, for the one regards the cause and the other, the effect. That is why the first is proper to Jesus but not to Mary; the second belongs to Mary and is not applicable to Jesus at all. There is as much incompatibility between adoption and natural sonship in Jesus, as there is in natural sonship and adoption in Mary. Just as natural sonship excludes adopted sonship, so adopted sonship is in formal opposition to natural sonship. Thus in both created grace and uncreated grace as well, Jesus is always the natural Son; He is always the first Son of grace and has the fullness of both types of grace. These graces are not mutually exclusive, although He cannot be the first adoptive son, for in every other person but Himself, that is the proper effect of created grace.

In Jesus one would have expected a twofold image of son, in conformity with the two fullnesses of grace which were in Him. If personal grace stamps Him with His sub-

⁴ John 1:14.

lime character of a natural Son of God, habitual grace is sufficiently powerful to produce a son of God by participation. How happy the universe would have been if these two images could have been manifested in Christ! While the glory of God's only Son would have been adored by men and angels, the glory of the first adopted son would have manifested itself in a beauty commensurate to the excellence of the plenitude of grace in the soul of Christ. But He was not a son by participation, because there is more honor in being Son by nature. We must, therefore, believe that when St. John spoke of the created and uncreated graces in Jesus Christ, he stressed in them both the natural sonship alone: "We saw His glory, the glory as it were of the Only-begotten of the Father." ⁵

Christ's natural sonship follows from His uncreated subsistence, which anticipates the effect of human subsistence, just as natural sonship precedes the production of adopted sonship. As the divine and human nature are united in Christ in such a way that the glory of the one does not absorb the lowliness of the other, neither does the poverty of the one in any way lessen the majesty of the other. So too, habitual grace does not dishonor the grace of union, any more than the grace of union absorbs habitual grace. But as human nature is deified in its union with the divine nature, so sanctifying grace is also divinely ennobled by His personal grace. And if the particular human nature in this union becomes something proper to the nature of God, then the participated grace in His soul must become peculiar to the Person of the Son of God.

Let us pause to admire this remarkable likeness. The two natures are mutually supported in Jesus Christ, although the two subsistences proper to them cannot be united. The

⁵ John 1:14.

human subsistence or person cedes to a divine one, thereby not hindering the ennobling of the human nature, which subsists in the divine Person. The same is true of the two graces which follow the union of these two natures. They are united even if the two sonships proper to them cannot be joined. Adopted sonship yields to natural sonship. Truly, then, we may say that the annihilation of the adopted sonship glorifies the natural sonship.

In Christ there was no sonship by participation nor did human subsistence find place in Him. Habitual grace yielded to adoption and human nature was emptied of its human subsistence to receive a divine subsistence instead.

Devotion prompts me to state that, given the incompatibility between adopted sonship and the holy soul of Jesus Christ, He conceived the plan of bestowing it upon His Mother, so that she might be the first adopted daughter of grace. Reserving to Himself the abundance of the primary source of grace, He wishes to bestow upon her all its effects. He retains within Himself the source of grace, without experiencing all its effects, but He bestows upon her the effects, while withholding the font from her. She is, therefore, first in adopted grace, but she is not the principle of the grace of adoption. But while she may be the first daughter of grace by participation, she is not the very fullness of that grace, which means that her adopted sonship falls short of that magnificent grandeur which is due to it in its source.

Mary was the first to receive the effect of the grace of adoption; Jesus was the only one to whom personal grace was proper. Just as He is the only natural Son, she is the first adopted daughter. On earth and now in heaven she bears the image of an adopted child of God, and Jesus, that of a natural Child of God. Of the two sonships corre-

sponding to the twofold grace of Jesus, He takes one, leaving the other for His Mother, together with the privilege of primacy that He wants to share with her, due proportion being guarded. And although He could not grant her the ultimate source of this primacy of grace without conferring upon her a natural sonship—which is impossible—He became her Son. Thus, contracting with her the most intimate and perfect possible union between God and a pure creature, He laid the foundation in her soul for that affinity for grace which is compatible in a created person. Not that Mary was to become the everflowing cause of adopted sonship, but she was to be first in imitating and in participating His natural sonship. She was to be the model, in this matter of participation, for all those who would be honored by becoming adoptive children of God.

It is clear that the primacy of adopted sonship should be based upon a grace which is midway between the grace proper to all other adopted children and that which belonged properly to God's natural Son. Being Mother of Him who is the plenitude of all grace and being close to Him in the sacred humanity which she gave Him, she was undoubtedly possessed of a grace which had some resemblance to the divine affinity which her divine maternity gave her. And as, in this blessed dignity, she had contact with the uncreated Word in the lower nature which He joined in the unity of His Person to the divine nature, it was fitting that her grace be a perfect imitation of that same Word made flesh.

Nothing is closer or more similar to a cause than its effect, and since the proper effect of the grace infused into Jesus' soul was the primacy of adopted sonship, which could not be realized in Him who was its source, it was

bestowed upon Mary, who alone is related to Him by affinity. She had also to receive a grace that could establish in her that primacy of adopted sonship which would have been Christ's, had it not been absorbed or displaced by His natural sonship.

CHAPTER 25 K

Mary's Cross

MARY'S grace is a grace of affinity, that is, a grace proportioned to the august condition of one who has begotten a God. This eminent dignity is second only to that of the Son whom she brings forth in His mortal nature. But where her maternity is, there also is her cross. As she was the most blessed mother in the world, she must also have been the most afflicted. The closer she was to Christ, the more painful her martyrdom had to be, for she was conformed to His sufferings as she was to His splendors. As the first image of adopted sonship in grace, she had also to be a most perfect imitation of the properties of that grace in the soul of her Son. The divine affinity which raised her above the natural order was the principle whereby she was first in the order of adopted sonship and it was the source of her cross. She was abased in proportion as she was exalted above everything except the living God.

Mary is the Mother of God, but her maternity was not without cross or grace. It would be a paradox of the love and wisdom of her Son to have a Mother who was not filled with grace, but in view of His design to die for men, it would have been repugnant for her to be His Mother and not have a mind and heart saturated with sorrows. As Mary drew close to divinity, through the sacred humanity

which she gave her Son, it follows that although her grace was not a sharing of the personal grace of her Son, she had a very particular affinity to it. Finally, this grace had to be characterized by an inclination to the cross; not by a simple sharing of it, as is the case of the saints, but by a special affinity which was proper to her and could not be communicated to any other creature.

Mary belonged to Jesus' cross in a way different from that of the saints. They are said to be imitators and bearers of the cross; she was to burden Him with a cross more painful to Him than the one upon which He was to die. In becoming His Mother she became the occasion of Jesus' martyrdom.

Mary's affinity for the cross of Jesus consisted in this: in becoming His Mother, she was the principle of His cross in that human nature which she gave Him. She was His first cross; in her He offered His first sacrifice and began His experience of suffering and pain.

The grace which other men receive does not elevate them to a divine affinity but holds them to the order of participation. It does not dispose them to become so many crosses for Him, but inclines them only to bear them in imitation and to feel them by compassion. But it was not enough that Mary suffer with Christ; she attained the glory of her maternity by assuming the obligation to provide her Son's cross, for the Son of God was incapable of pain until He became the Son of man. Grace disposes one for the task to which he is called, and Mary was chosen to be God's Mother in a flesh in which He could experience pain. By her grace, then, Mary contracted an affinity to her Son's cross as well as to His uncreated Person. As His Mother she had also to be His cross.

No pure creature could ever attain a higher grace than

to be the Mother of God; on the other hand, there is no affliction more cruel than for one close to God to be a cross for God. Mary realized that her exaltation was caused by God's abasement; that her glorious privileges were due to the union, within her holy womb, of uncreated beauty with the ugliness of our nature, of divine glory with the pain and ignominy necessary to satisfy for our crimes. The flesh which Mary gave to Jesus was not cursed by the stain of original sin, but only as regards the penalty for sin. In her chaste body He united to Himself the body which owed a debt for sin, to destroy in us the body stained by sin.1 He provided Himself with the body of a sinful race and His divinity was fitted to the littleness of our mortal condition. But although Jesus assumed a debtor's body, it would have been incompatible with His perfect holiness and the purity which was His Mother's special privilege that He take from her a body stained by sin.

Rebecca was prompted by the Holy Spirit to clothe her son Jacob in Esau's garments ² so that, presenting himself to his father Isaac, he might receive the privileges which were due to the blessing of the first-born. Mary clothed the Son of God with the flesh of a sinful race so that He might appear to be a sinner and laden with the debt of sin. She made Him a sinner as regards the debt for sin, although He was without the stain of sin. Why? So that by paying the debt of sin He might destroy the stains of sin.³ As far as the debt for sin is concerned, the old man, as St. Paul says, ⁴ is crucified with Jesus Christ to the destruction of the body of sin. He assumed our shameful condition to suffer the curse of God the Father, who exacted from this innocent One all that our crimes deserved.

¹ II Cor. 5:21.

² Gen. 27:15.

⁸ II Cor. 5:21.

⁴ Rom. 6:6.

He exacted of Jesus that satisfaction which our unworthiness could not render to Him and He desired to heap upon that Person who is consubstantial with and in every way equal to Him, all the weight of His anger. And He was the Almighty, justly irritated by the grievous offenses of His creatures.

Dressed in his borrowed clothes, Jacob feared lest he draw upon himself his father's curse instead of his blessing. His mother assured him that if any such misfortune were to arise, she alone would bear it.5 Mary would doubtless have been consoled if, after having clothed her Son in the habiliments of a sinner, she could herself have suffered whatever God in His eternal decree had resolved that Christ should suffer in time. Who can comprehend the greatness of her agony when she realized that her role as Mother required her to give her Son those borrowed garments of flesh which would draw down upon Him the malediction of His heavenly Father? She saw herself to be the cause, in the nature which she had given Him, of all the sufferings which our crimes deserved. It was she who subjected Him to the laws of providence, manifested in His regard by the most severe exactions of divine justice.

When her unborn twins struggled within her, Rebecca cried out: "If it were to be so with me, what need was there to conceive?" ⁶ In providing Jesus with a human body, Mary contracted her sublime relation of divine maternity, and in giving Him a body susceptible to suffering and death, she communicated to Him His obligation, freely accepted, of dying. She thereby was obligated to be the most sorrowful mother in all the world, because of her affinity to Him who was full of sorrows.

That Mary was surprised when Gabriel saluted her is not

⁵ Gen. 27:12-13.

⁶ Gen. 25:22.

astonishing. He told her that she would conceive God's Son,⁷ that she would give Him flesh and for nine months would hold Him in her virginal womb. He told her that at the end of this period she would bring Him forth upon earth, burdened with a cross of flesh much more difficult to endure than the wooden cross upon which He would suffer for a few short hours. On Calvary this Mother was not troubled as she stood beneath the cross of her dying Son, but she was troubled at Nazareth when the Incarnation took place.

We are the cross, says St. Bernard, on which Jesus was affixed. If a man stretches out his arms, he assumes the form of a cross. St. Justin Martyr pointed out to his pagan hearers that they could not curse the cross without conceiving at the same time a horror for themselves, inasmuch as man is formed in the shape of a cross.

Jesus assumed a human nature, not endowed with the special gifts it enjoyed before Adam's sin, but with those defects to which it has ever since been subject, excepting those which were not befitting His dignity as the Son of God. When He assumed this flesh, it was not in a transient manner, says St. Bernard, for He withdrew not from it.8 He is Emmanuel, or God-with-us. We may say with equal truth, "The Word was made a cross" and "The Word was made flesh."

⁷ Luke 1:31.

⁸ Sermo 4 in vigilia Nativitatis Domini (P.L. 183. col. 103).

CHAPTER 26 K

A Cross for Her Son

IN the book of Exodus we read how God commanded Moses to build an ark two and a half cubits long by one and a half in width. This prescription was mystically fulfilled when God, moved by His wisdom as well as by His love, adapted Himself to man's measure in the mystery of the Incarnation. Indeed, to speak of the Incarnate God is to speak of a God crucified in the flesh or attached to a cross of flesh. The dimensions of Moses' ark represent the figure or form of the cross, and as the mystery of the Incarnation fulfills that prophecy, it is easy for us to see how Mary, whose womb held Him whom the heavens cannot contain, takes the place of a cross for Him and causes Him both pain and suffering.

Mary is the mystical ark of the covenant between Creator and creature, between God and man, virginity and mother-hood, mercy and justice, created and uncreated grace, heavenly and earthly life. She is the earthly throne of Him whose throne is eternal and who is Himself of the same substance as the living Father, as St. Paul says.¹ The cherubim who stood over the ark dared not gaze upon the splendor of the divinity, but Mary, as St. Epiphanius says,² gazed

¹ Heb. 1:8.

² Homilia 5, De laudibus B. Virginis Mariae (P.G. 43, col. 497.)

steadily upon Him who possesses ineffable splendor. In her ardent devotion she raised her eyes to the source of this splendor. She pressed her lips to the God of glory as a sign of her love for Him, thus combining a mother's duties toward her Son with a creature's duties toward her God.

If the ark was fashioned in the form of a cross, we may not deny that same name to the Mother of God. St. Epiphanius, after wavering between fear and desire, between horror and truth, finally declared her to be simultaneously a throne and a cross. It is worthy of Mary's extraordinary greatness that she be a heaven, capable of enclosing in her womb the circle which surrounds the heavens in its immensity. She is a throne, because she lacks none of the perfections possessed by the heavenly spirits of the order of thrones, nor does she lack those possessed by the cherubim and seraphim, who far surpass the thrones. But to say that Mary is also a cross is something St. Epiphanius dared to say only because he had perceived a rare but marvelous truth.

Was Mary a cross because she represented a cross to Him as she held Him in fond embrace? If what St. Brigid says is true, it seemed to Mary that as the Child lay in her arms, He was carried upon the cross. Shall we not also say that in presenting Him in the temple to the holy Simeon that she was both the sacrificer and the altar of His sacrifice? Were not her feelings so identical with those of her Son that as she offered herself as a victim in the heart of Jesus, she also provided Him with an altar whereon He could begin the sacrifice which He would one day finish upon Calvary? Indeed, we may say that Mary served as a cross even on Calvary. There she was a more painful cross for

³ St. Epiphanius, loc. cit.

her Son than anything else which contributed to His agony. Could Mary be ignorant of Jesus' great love for her? Did she not know that her presence alone would cause Him more pain than would all the other persons there who were crucifying Him?

Cruel Mother, if I may dare say it, where were you going? And what were you thinking? Were not the sufferings of your adorable Son sufficiently severe that you should increase their number and intensity? Should you, the most glorious Mother among all women, be apparently less a mother than others?

Mary's stainless life was directed by Heaven. All her words, thoughts, and deeds were prompted by the laws of a special and a particular providence which governed her singular position in the state of grace. Only because God had so commanded did she assist at the sufferings which closed the gates of life and opened those of death to her well-beloved Son.

All this goes to show that Mary is a cross. Jesus was bound to her by the bonds of nature as a fruit is united to the tree that bears it and from which it draws its life and growth. In Mary's conception of her Son and during her pregnancy of nine full months, the ordinary laws of motherhood were perfectly observed in all that was not derogatory to her virginity or unworthy of the sanctity of her Child. There, too, He made His first sacrifice, for as St. Paul says: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then I said: Behold I come [to substitute Myself for them, because] in the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O God." 4

⁴ Heb. 10:5-7.

Jesus twice offered Himself in sacrifice to the Father, once upon entering the world and again when leaving it. The first opened to Him the door of miseries, the other closed it. The first launched Him upon a life full of vexations, the other admitted Him to a blessed life. Mary was His first altar, the cross was the last. Calvary's cross was artificial; Mary was a natural cross.

Mary and the cross complement one another, the one completing the sacrifice begun by the other. In her womb He said: "Behold I come," and on the cross He cried out: "It is finished." In both, Jesus experienced the extremity of the sufferings His Father would have Him endure. There is not a more cruel way to die than to die on the ignominious cross, and surely God could not have chosen a more shameful and painful manner of entering this world than that of human generation, if we consider our Lord's perfect use of reason and all the other details of knowledge and life which followed upon His conception.

Throughout His whole life Jesus manifested toward His all-powerful Father that tenderness of heart which is proper to a beloved son. He never addressed Him except as Father, aside from the time He lay in the womb of His Mother or upon the cross of Calvary. The evangelists noted how he cried out: "My God, My God" when His torments had reduced Him near to death. "It is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O God." The Prophet-King from whom St. Paul borrows these words had Him speak thus on the cross. His "My God!" seems to mean: "O God, to what have You reduced Me? Do You abandon Me? What is that cross You impose upon Me which makes it possible for Me, who am eternal, to die! To what constraint have

⁵ Ps. 21:11.

You condemned Your only Son, putting Him in a strange womb whence He is to be born and to live a life ill-suited to His infinite grandeur?"

Mary, where now is your heart? Did not Gabriel instruct you sufficiently concerning that which was taking place within you as regards your Son's condition there? His presence enlightens your mind; do you not now understand His plaintive cries to His Father, so expressive of His lowly condition as a creature in the nature you gave Him? If you do understand, how can you bear to be a living instrument of His cruel death? If He is to you a spouse of blood, it is because you were a Mother of blood to Him. If He makes you God's Mother, it is because you will give Him a son of flesh. If He pours into your bosom a fullness of grace, it is because you will provide Him with a body which will be the principle of sorrow proportioned to the infinite joy which His Father communicates to Him.

If the cry which the torments of the cross had wrung from Him was powerful enough to cause you greater pain of mind than the wheel or the stake ever caused the martyrs, you will grant that neither the angels of Heaven nor yourself can describe the tremor that came upon you when, by revelation, you heard a new language spoken to the Son of God in your holy womb: "O God, I have desired to do Thy will." He cried out thus from the moment of His conception, the Prophet says, and directed to His Father the lament that He would later address to Him during His dark passion: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" From the womb of His Mother He took upon Himself the obligation of suffering all the sorrows recounted in the Psalm.⁶

Holy Virgin, incomparable and sublime Mother, Jesus

⁶ Ps. 21:1 ff.

is hardly your Son when He is a child of sorrows. He is your Benjamin, and your Benoni. He is a Son of man, a Man of all sufferings and pain. His delicacy, fine complexion and good body, all of which you gave Him, do not lessen but increase your affliction, for all these good qualities formed part of that body of which He speaks to His Father. It was a body fit to be offered up in sacrifice to His glory amid sufferings that defy description.

I look with wonder on your ecstasies, O Mary; I give honor to your transports and ravishments of spirit; and I revere your sublime contemplation wherein you gazed at the workings of the Father within you in the conception of His Son. However, the privilege of grace that is yours is accompanied by a severity as well as a grandeur. You are Christ's Mother, but you are also His cross. He honors you, the most blessed of all creatures, but you have good reason to be the most sorrowful of them all. You too can say, as did the Prophet: "See, Lord, how I am oppressed. My bowels are troubled, my heart cast down within me."

Alas, did not Mary have reason to say: "My God, have pity and compassion upon Your creature! Turn the eyes of Your pity upon me, look upon me with clemency, and consider the trouble and agitation of my womb, which is horrified at the thought of bearing its Creator and of holding Him there attached by bonds which are stronger than the nails which one day shall pierce His flesh on the wood of the cross! My bowels tremble to give You a life without which You would live in happiness. Must I, O God, be a Mother under these circumstances? Ask of me the very blood that runs in my veins, command the executioners to take me and affix me to that cross and You will see it bubble forth in drops large enough to satisfy You. If You

⁷ Gen. 35:18.

would have me languish upon the cross amid the harshest test Your justice can devise, draw from all parts of my body and from all the faculties of my soul whatever satisfaction You desire. I will be brave enough to approve Your sternest demand, save only that of giving You the body of pain as You command."

Indeed, it is impossible to express the sorrow Mary felt in her mind and heart. Her sorrows increased as the Child within her grew. "Since it is a fact, since You are my Son and I Your Mother, I cannot and must not oppose this necessity of being a cross to You. It has been so determined in the council of the most adorable Trinity and irrevocably fixed in Heaven by laws which I cannot oppose. Draw from my veins, then, that blood which is the cause of Your pains and drink deeply in my womb the sorrows for which You have so great a thirst. Forbid me not the affliction which racks my sympathetic and loving heart. I need to be strengthened by Your Father's power and to be assisted by the presence of the Holy Spirit, if I am to suffer You in this state in my womb and do not myself die of sorrow. I need such help if I am to be the natural principle of the sorrows You endure there."

Shall we then refer to the nine months of pregnancy, O purest of all creatures, as glorious days of joy for you or as calamitous days of sorrow? What sweetness could hold your heart enthralled when you know that suffering has taken possession of the sacred soul of Him who is both your beloved Child and your Creator? Your transports of will and continual raptures of mind help you appreciate His extreme desolation and arouse in you all the force and tenderness of your love. You will be so much the more miserable because heaven obliges you to be the cause of His sufferings in the very bonds of affinity which

your role as His Mother involves. O Woman, the fullness of your graces and the abundance of your charity resemble the rivers which plunge into the sea wherein their sweetness is changed into bitterness, for within your womb, grace and the cross are inseparable.

O singular woman that you are, blessed among all women, I do not include you among those other mothers who bring forth their children in pain. You did not feel the weight of the blessed fruit you carry; you did not experience the nausea and other infirmities that ordinarily accompany childbearing. Alas, you paid with usury for the pains which you do not experience on your virginal bed. Weakness and faintness may not impair your body, but pain and sorrow do their cruel work upon your spirit. Your afflictions are of the same order as your maternity. The desolation in your heart is measured by the greatness of your graces. Your Son is not a burden to you, but you are still worthy of compassion, if only because you clothe Him with the heavy yoke of our mortality, with the insupportable weight of a flesh that is most sensitive to pain.

⁹ Gen. 3:16.

CHAPTER 27 K

Valiant Woman

ALMIGHTY GOD chose Mary to be the Mother of His Son, and yet that bond of sublime affinity which made Jesus her Son was the reason why she received a grace which was to separate her from Him. She would not be a mother who would be inebriated with the sweetness of His presence while He was suffering affliction and sadness. He would be to her as a bundle of bitter myrrh, and in the flesh which she gave Him she was for Him a living source of sadness. Her burning love for Him should not fully enjoy that over which she had a mother's right, once she knew that it would suffer the severity of divine justice and that she would be the instrument of that justice. Thus the grace proper to her maternity separated her from that role, for her role as mother deprives her of her Son. Her relationship with God distilled gall into everything that might bring her joy, and because she was so close to God, her sorrows were the greater, being proportioned to the great majesty to which she had been raised.

Mary did not bask in the pleasant chambers of the divine consolations of her Son nor was she constantly held in loving arms against that bosom wherein the fullness of the Godhead dwells corporeally.¹ Under one aspect, Jesus was for Mary an object of pleasure, but from another He was

¹ Col. 2:9.

an object of pain. He was the cause of her joy and of her suffering. Indeed, the sufferings which His love caused her to endure and the death which His holiness produced in her soul far surpassed any pleasure deriving to her from the presence of her dearly beloved Son.

Mary was united to the supreme good by a gift which pertained to the hypostatic order, especially while she bore her Son within her. Because of His union with His Mother by natural bonds, He was conjoined to her as a part is joined to the whole, as a fruit to a tree, a rose to a bush. She therefore shared in the infinite and special excellence of her Son. Those who had any knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, like St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth, and the angels, could only with difficulty separate the honor which they were compelled to tender Mary from that which they owed to her Son. They did not think that her maternity gave her a right to supreme honor, but by a divine light they saw the intimate union existing between those two bodies and how profoundly those two persons were united in one and the same substance and flesh. It was therefore difficult to refrain from deliberately rendering to Mary during her pregnancy that supreme cult which her Son merits absolutely. During those nine months Jesus was to her as fruit is to a tree. But honor is not given the tree; it is the fruit that is honored and, by a kind of overflow, the tree shares in it.

The Holy Spirit has given us these ideas through the lips of Elizabeth, who referred to Mary's Child as the "fruit of thy womb." Elizabeth seemed not to distinguish between the blessedness of the fruit and that of the tree to which it was attached. "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." ² She did not say

² Luke 1:42.

"Whence is this to me, that my Lord should come to me?" but rather, "that the mother of my Lord should come to me." ³ Her words seemed to draw attention to the unified existence which Jesus had with His Blessed Mother.

The closer one is to an object endowed with some power or strength, the more one feels its force. The Blessed Virgin drank deeply from an inexhaustible source of suffering when she carried the divine Infant within her. God had chosen her from all eternity to be the Mother of His Son, a dignity surpassing in grandeur everything else created by Him. He desired also to bestow upon her the graces and favors God's Mother alone should have, and so she had to feel within herself all the afflictions and pains proper to a suffering God. Hence, in the Incarnation Mary was elevated above the greatest and most sublime creatures of heaven and earth, but she had also to be the most desolate and the most sorely tried by cruel sufferings.

Indeed, no one in nature or grace has more perfectly and fully verified the sublime words of St. Paul than Mary: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Mary naturally felt her Son's bodily pains and mental anguish because of the bond that binds a mother to her child. As Jesus suffered not as a simple man, but as a God-Man, so Mary suffered, not as if she were an ordinary mother, but as the Mother of God. Her affliction of heart was measured by her extraordinary dignity, just as those of her Son were proportioned to His infinite Person and the plenitude of grace which caused them, for His grace was ordered to the ministry taken up by Him in the chaste body of His beloved Mother. The grace in Jesus' soul, unable to produce an adopted sonship in Christ, exercised all its force for the ministry He had assumed.

³ Luke 1:43.

Job's friends tried to console him during the severe trial which the inscrutable providence of God had sent him as a test, for God knew of his courageous, generous faith. Tiring of their empty words, Job expressed the charitable wish that those who were so ready with explanations which fitted into their own views would trade places with him and learn that it is one thing to talk about another's suffering and quite another to experience it. "I too could speak like you if you were in my place!" ⁸

If God had not required the sufferings of His natural Son to satisfy for our sins, those of the Blessed Virgin Mother would have been more than sufficient—had He desired to accept them—to make expiation and satisfaction for us.⁶ In the mystery of the Incarnation the human person is divinized to an eminent degree, and St. Thomas declared the Blessed Virgin to be one of those things which, even by His absolute power, God cannot improve upon. She is the Mother of God, the *ne plus ultra*. Due proportion being observed, we may say that her sufferings were second only to those of the Son of God and that if God had wished to obtain satisfaction for the sins of mankind by using another person than an uncreated one for that purpose, her sufferings might fitly have supplied for His.

Thus, Mary shared in a peculiarly fitting way the sufferings imposed upon the Second Person of the uncreated Trinity. The interior martyrdom of the Second Eve was, as St. Irenaeus says, associated with that of the Second Adam so as to destroy the ruinous conspiracy of the first woman with the first man. So Mary's sufferings followed those of her Son's, just as His grace gives her a part in the hypostatic union. Her sufferings were similar to those of Jesus and

⁵ Job 16:4. ⁶ Summa theol., IIIa, q.46, a.2.

Lib. 3, cap. 22 (P.G. 7, col. 959).

in some way were the same, inasmuch as we say that she formed but one and the same thing with Him. However, I would not go so far as to say that she contributed in this capacity to our redemption. In that, Christ wanted no companion, as St. Ambrose says. The sufferings of the Blessed Virgin contributed nothing to our satisfaction, however sufficient they would have been if God had wished to accept them for that purpose. They pale into insignificance when compared to the great merit of the satisfaction offered by the natural Son. His were infinitely greater than those of His holy Mother, for it is greater to be God by nature than to be God by affinity, as she was. Moreover, since it is better to be God by affinity than by participation, Mary had a greater part in the afflictions of her Son than all other creatures capable of sharing in it.

In the Old Law, God had prescribed that the people be sprinkled with some of the blood of the victim as they assisted at the sacrifice and that the remainder of it be poured out over the altar.8 We have seen how Mary's bosom was the altar upon which Jesus made His first sacrifice. On it too he poured forth all His sorrows and all the great anguish which tormented Him without surcease. Other saints only came into contact with them from afar, as it were, and extrinsically, by their compassion. Mary's soul took the place of the soul of her dear Infant, so as to receive them as far as she could, by an affinity based not so much on nature as upon the sovereign and unique grace proper to her as God's Mother and His first adopted daughter. As Jesus' vicar she bore the sufferings He would have endured in the human personality he would have had if His human nature could have had both a human and a divine person simultaneously.

In his description of the garments of the divine Spouse,

⁸ Exod. 24:6.

the Psalmist cried out: "Myrrh and aloes and cassia perfume thy garments." The raiment of the king is the sacred humanity of Mary's Son, enclosed for nine months within her chaste womb as in a palace of ivory. What garments! Christ's sacred humanity is but the myrrh of torment and the aloes of bitterness, yet once Eternal Wisdom put them on, His fragrance arouses the compassion of the faithful, drawing them, and making them run after Him. Only Mary, whose blessed womb was like an ark or an ivory coffer which contained that adorable humanity, had contact with it, not only by memories and thoughts, which aroused her to compassion, but by an actual, genuine, and real application or impression arising from her admirable affinity to Christ.

Only the love of Jesus fully explains why His Mother is so like Him in grandeur and why she is such a finished imitation of Him. From this resemblance arises the answering love of the Mother for her Son. She adapts and makes herself like Him by wholly conforming herself to the dispositions of His divine soul which make of Him a Man of Sorrows "acquainted with infirmity." ¹¹ Truly, if human love has the power to transform the lover into the thing loved and leads him to make another's dispositions of heart and mind his own, what will be the result of supernatural love? Such love is incomparably stronger than human love, for it is based upon a principle which irresistibly produces its own proper effect, namely, the union of a creature with its Creator.

When Moses came down from the mountain his face glowed with light after the forty days and nights he had spent with God.¹² An ecstatic love such as this was the reason why St. Paul felt in himself only Christ crucified.¹³

Ps. 44:9.Exod. 34:29.

¹⁰ Cant. 1:3. 13 Gal. 2:19.

¹¹ Isa. 53:3.

So filled was he with this thought that he professed to know nothing else.¹⁴ His long contemplation of the Master's sufferings had so absorbed him that he could not envisage any other glory but the cross of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ "Let no man be troublesome to me," he said, "for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body," ¹⁶ as if this remarkable Apostle was lost to himself and to all things and was filled with the sentiments of Christ, of whom he was more aware than he was of himself.

It will be not only difficult but quite impossible to do justice to the greatness of Mary's sufferings. Her human and supernatural love surpassed all other loves. It is said that mothers love their children more than fathers do, because a woman is especially inclined to love. When David would show his love for Jonathan, he declared that he loved him as a mother loves her only son,¹⁷ and God Himself spoke in like manner to indicate the extent of His love for Israel.¹⁸ Yet even if judged by this norm, the love of other mothers cannot be compared to Mary's for her Son. She alone, without the help of a husband, gave of her substance to form Jesus in the human nature He deigned to draw from her chaste body. The tender, loving strength of both father and mother met and were concentrated in her and their living warmth took possession of her heart.

What father or mother ever had so many reasons for loving their offspring as the Mother of God had for loving Jesus Christ? In Him were all the perfections of nature and of grace, of a creature and Creator. Moreover, the natural affection which mothers have for their children takes on a new life and growth from the infused charity which was proper to Mary's sublime maternity. Here she

¹⁴ I Cor. 2:2.

¹⁵ Gal. 6:14.

¹⁶ Gal. 6:17.

¹⁷ II Kings, 1:26.

¹⁸ Isa. 66:13.

far outstripped the seraphim, however close they may stand to uncreated Love. Mary was more familiar with and had greater contact, union, use and enjoyment of the omnipotent source of all love and she was more inclined toward it than any other created subject except the adorable soul of Christ her Son. Since love transforms the disposition and sentiment of the soul of the lover, the angels themselves are incapable of expressing the sorrows which were Mary's in her association with the painful agony of Jesus, whom she loved above all nature and common grace.

As regards substance and nature, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are love, although the Holy Spirit is the happy term of the act of love which they by their common will produce in loving one another and all things. Thus the Holy Spirit is peculiarily fitted to be a principle in the production of creatures. It is for this reason that He alone of all the adorable Persons of the Trinity is called Gift, because He is produced by love and because love is not so much the source of all gifts as itself the first and principal gift. The favors done by enemies are lacking in grace, and gifts given without love cease to be gifts because they have not that which love alone can give them.

It is by one and the same love that God loves creatures and what is divine. In Him there can be only one term of love; He loves Himself and all things through the Holy Spirit. We see, then, that the Holy Spirit can be considered either in His eternal relation to the Father and the Son who concur as one principle in His production, or temporally in relation to creatures. Taken in the first way, He is not an active gift, in the way the Father is as regards the Son, to whom He gives His essence. In His relation to the Father and Son, He is only a passive gift, that is, receiving and not giving, proceeding but not producing.

But as regards creatures, the Holy Spirit is an active gift, because all their blessings and graces flow from Him. He is not the last Person in grandeur, perfection, and dignity, although He is the last in order of procession. He is the last term of the eternal, immanent processions, the resting-place as it were of the Most Holy Trinity. The living Father is first, and before Him there is no other divine Person; the Holy Spirit is the last, and after Him there is no eternal procession, no necessary production. He is the ultimate term; the Father is the first principle of the Godhead.

It should be noted that it is precisely where the Holy Spirit is the happy term of all eternal operation, that He begins to be the principle of things temporal. Because He is the immutable term of the uncreated and necessary processions in God, He is the source of all free and created processions in virtue of His being produced and because He is that love from which all free giving and liberality derive. Hence it is that of all the divine Persons, it is most proper that the Holy Spirit should by attribution be the closest to creatures. It is through the Holy Spirit that God communicates Himself to us. It is through Him that we return to God, as through the Person who is, according to our way of putting it, closest to creatures.¹⁹

The seraphim, the highest of the angels, are said to be ardent and burning, for they stand close to the very cause of love. Theirs is the highest place in the heavenly hierarchy and they are enveloped in the living flames of love. But Mary, thanks to the loving work of the Holy Spirit, surpassed the seraphim in their nearness to the divine Person. She also, in a manner more eminent than they, participated in the warmth of that uncreated fire. Since God confers no office or ministry on anyone without provid-

¹⁹ I Heb. 1:12.

ing what is necessary for the worthy discharge of that office, the Mother of God would have to have a love that was proportioned to one who was overshadowed by the power of the Most High so that she might conceive and bear His Son. She must therefore possess, so far as it was possible to a creature under grace, the Father's love for His Son. She is the earthly representative of fatherhood. No natural power could bring her to conceive the Divine Word, and if she was to love and serve Him, she would need a supernatural love transcending that of the seraphim.

We should not be surprised at this. Mary's grace was to be close to the Divine Word. May we not go further and say that her love contracts a sort of affinity with the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is uncreated Love? Inferior to the Holy Spirit, yet among His most gracious works, no one is more sublime or so conjoined to Him than Mary. With Him she forms but one principle in the temporal generation of the eternally begotten Word. Through Him she gives to the Father a beloved Son whom He could not have had before she became His Mother.

May we not say that the Holy Spirit communicated to her all His power and that while He gave Himself partially to other saints, He poured Himself forth in her to produce one of whom He was not the Father? Everyone knows that virginity is a lesser virtue than charity. Without love Mary's virginity was not pleasing to God. Christ answered the woman who had cried out "Blessed be the womb that bore Thee," by saying: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Without charity this cannot be done. If we can say with the Church that Mary is "the holy and immaculate Virginity," may we not also, for the same reason, call her "incomparable holy Love" and the Mother of fair love? This name of fair love can belong only to

Him who, being eternal beauty by reason of His own immanent production, has conjoined love to His Sonship by His temporal generation. Moreover, if one shares in the loved one's sadness and the greater the love the more painfully one's beloved suffers and the more perfectly one knows the suffering, then Jesus' Mother also merits the name of "Holy Sorrow."

Picture Abraham's interior anguish when he was commanded to immolate his son, Jsaac.20 Imagine the pain felt by Jephthe at the sacrifice of his daughter.21 Consider Respha's bitterness as she gazed upon her two sons whom the Gabaonites had hanged.22 Think of the mother of the Machabees as she saw her seven sons suffering martyrdom.²³ Yet all these and other earthly sorrows fade in comparison with those Mary felt at the death of the Son whom she loved more tenderly than all earthly fathers and mothers do their children. How shall we separate her love from her cross, and her love and her cross from Jesus' love and cross? Of a truth, the life of Jesus and of Mary is not so much a union as a unity of heart and soul. The greater the love, the greater the pain. As Jesus spent His life amid cruel sufferings, Mary's love had also to be wholly immersed in sadness, and her sadness in love. She had to live and die painfully aware of the suffering in Jesus' life and death, all the more so as her love for her Son was as great as it was.

²⁰ Gen. 22.

²¹ Judges 11.

²² II Kings 21.

²⁸ II Macch. 7.

CHAPTER 28 K

Cause of Mary's Suffering

MARY loved Jesus without any of the imperfections for which the apostles were scolded and without any ties that would have delayed the sending of the Holy Spirit. Her unselfish love united her to Jesus by the pleasure she took in those goods with which He was worthily adorned. There was no selfish love in her, no turning back upon herself, on the plea that motherhood gave her rights over His divine Person. She never loved anyone but Him. She loved Him as she knew Him to be lovable. In her extraordinary love for the divine Infant she was completely forgetful of herself. His adorable majesty did more to stir up the living flame of her love than all those singular favors by which she had become a mother. In a word, Mary always regarded Jesus with a greater purity and detachment than any other pure creature. Her love, however, did not prevent her from suffering, because it was for her a principle of separation in proportion as it was loftier, purer, holier, and more closely joined to its source.

Jesus' birth caused in Mary a greater plenitude of joy than it did in the angels or in the shepherds. But did He not even then flood her soul with sorrow, in that she saw Him reduced to the plight of one who was a criminal, coming into the world like a child of wrath, doing penance for sins which He could not commit and having His teeth set on edge by a bitter wine which He had not touched?

Dear God, can this Mother contemplate her divine Child upon earth, naked as a worm (as He calls Himself in the words of the Prophet), kicking His little feet, opening His little hands, sweetly turning His head and, eyes brimming with tears, uttering a cry that would soften the hearts of tigers and she not be affected as much as by the cry He uttered when dying upon the cross? Can she gaze upon her Son without dying a thousand times, without bursting with sorrow and compassion? Her breasts were a fountain of life to her suckling Child, but was not her joy transformed into pain when she recalled that He was only changing this milk into His own substance in order one day to shower down His blood from the cross where all things declared bitter war upon Him without regard for the fact that He was their Creator? When putting her mouth to His she joyfully imbibed the Spirit which is for all men the source of eternal life, but was He not an instrument of pain for her when she realized that He came into the world to die and that a grim wood awaited those limbs which He now yielded to the swaddling clothes.

St. Peter is represented with a cross, St. Paul with a sword, St. Stephen with stones, St. Lawrence with a fiery grill, and St. Catherine with a wheel inset with knives, to show how they died. Jesus in Mary's arms was the instrument of her martyrdom, a sword of suffering piercing the soul of His Blessed Mother, as Simeon had prophesied. Jesus was indeed that adorable Word, more penetrating than any double-edged sword, separating Mary's spirit and soul. He Himself was no exception, for He often deprived her of His presence and left her to her ordinary life. As for this, we can better meditate on it than understand it.

No child ever loved his mother as much as Jesus did Mary, and among all creatures there was none whose sanctity He desired more efficaciously. So too, no one was ever made to suffer as she did by separations and sensible privations. This is very clearly brought out from the way in which He spoke to her. The gospels show that He always used words which pointed to the detachment He demanded of her. He wished to shut out from her thought everything productive of sensible joy. Thus, after she had searched for Him for three days and found Him in the temple in the midst of the doctors, Mary complained lovingly of the way He had caused her to worry and of the many tears she had shed during His absence. But He offered no excuse that would temper her great sorrow. Not only that, but He seems to have increased it more and more. Coming from such a Son and considering the desolation which His loss had caused His Mother, His reply was extremely harsh: "Why did you seek Me?" Yet this reply fits in well with His plan to make of His Mother a prodigious miracle of sanctity amid the marvels of grace.

On another occasion ² the wine ran short at the wedding feast to which Jesus and His disciples had been invited. Mary, in the tenderness of her love, tried to arouse His compassion to help the newly-weds in their crisis. She was astonished that He avoided calling her His Mother, answering her, apparently, with less sweetness than He felt for her in His heart. He gave her a common name that did not set her apart from the weakest and most imperfect of her sex: "Woman!" He used this name so that He might, in a mysterious way proper to His love, separate her mind and heart from complacency in her sublime maternity. He wished to detach her from sensible affection, from that

¹ Luke 2:48.

divine relationship which the sovereign grace of the Incarnation had set up between Him and her. "Why interfere? Do you have to give Me orders? Is there any special reason why I should be obliged to do as you ask?" 3 Thus might we interpret, at first, the words uttered in response to the confident request of His Mother. He undertook to divert her thoughts from her excellence, which gave her a right to a greater cult than we pay to God's saints. As the Apostle assures us, Christ "did not please Himself." * Being so close to Him in sanctity, Mary had to reproduce faithfully the effect of that sanctity, which means that she suffered as much from detachment from her divine motherhood as He did from His eternal sonship.

For this same reason He preferred the consolation of others to the deference He owed her. I sometimes contemplate that Mother as she waited for her divine Son in the street, at the door of the house in which, as was His custom, He spoke His words of salvation.⁵ Imagine her feelings when she learned, to judge by His words and by the results, that He would rather talk with strangers than with her. "Behold," they told Him, "Your Mother stands outside and wants to see You." 6 See with what loving skill He handled the means of Mary's sublime perfection while instructing less important people. While these enjoyed His presence, their minds and hearts divinely charmed by His words, she remains not so much deprived of this consolation as, apparently, despised. The others were sheltered; she was at the mercy of the elements. "Who is My Mother," He asks, "if not he who does the will of My Father." 7 And then, seeking always to detach her completely and perfectly from Himself, He held up for honor

³ John 2:4. 4 Rom. 15:3.

⁶ Luke 8:19-20; Mark 9:32.

⁵ Mark 3:31. 7 Mark 3:33-35.

and praise, not the breasts that nursed Him nor the womb that bore Him, but those who were attentive to the divine word and who tried generously to profit from it.8

These examples taken from the holy gospel were not nearly so trying as what happened on Calvary when Jesus was nearing His death. Horribly afflicted in the very depths of His soul, He seemed to show His grieving Mother less courtesy by addressing her simply as "Woman," than He would have had she been a stranger. At the wedding feast at Cana He was about to enter upon His divine work and He no longer knew His own flesh and blood. He had to acknowledge them on the cross, for St. Paul spoke of His frightfully harsh passion as the days of His flesh." Did He then omit the word "Mother" deliberately because maternity, in the opinion of men, entirely excludes virginity and He wished to honor her virginity by calling her "Woman?" Or it may be that He addressed her thus lest His tenderness cause her to die from sorrow.

O Sovereign Master! It does not seem right that You should deny Your august Mother, at least in this extremity, that name so descriptive of the duties she always tried to satisfy. Do You not see that she had a right in justice to demand this title? Leave aside her interior virtues, which have a luster in her beyond that even of the seraphim; conceal as You will the eminence of the grace to which Your sovereign goodness was pleased to raise her; turn, if You will, from the mighty flame of her charity, which well deserved that You use the title which would reveal how worthy of praise she is; but at least have compassion on her, saddened as she is by the strange turn Your life has taken. And after the calamitous shock of Your sufferings

during the agony, the scourging, and the crucifixion, all of which made of You a spectacle of horror on earth, do not let her say to You at the foot of the cross: "Son, why have You done this to me?" 11

Yet I find that Jesus Christ was not at all disposed to act in this way with His Mother. St. Ambrose guides us here: "Jesus knew her perfectly well and wished to instruct her, and she could not be ignorant of her Son's plan." 12 From the moment she was chosen to be not only the daughter of the Father, but the spouse of the Holy Spirit and the Mother of Jesus, she had always been led to divert her thoughts from her sublime ministry. When she was saluted as the Mother of God, her thoughts ran on to slavery, for she followed the example of her Son who, "being by nature in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as man. He humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." 13 St. Luke sensed this when, under divine inspiration, he recorded the movements and actions of the Virgin Mother. And when he mentions those who were gathered at the Cenacle awaiting the divine Paraclete, He mentions Mary in the last place.14

It was not, then, due to a lack of affection that Jesus called Mary "Woman" from the cross. It was part of a mysterious plan for a more perfect union and was directed to her perfect sanctification. He intended to set her apart, as He Himself was set apart, from all thought of consolation, with all grandeur stripped from her. He drew her away from all possession or property, including that of her very own Son. He deprived her of every relationship,

¹¹ Luke 2:48.

¹³ Phil. 2:6-8.

¹² St. Ambrose, loc. cit.

¹⁴ Acts 1:14.

including that which she contracted by affinity with the Person of a God. He helped despoil her of all the honors owed to her by creatures and of all the glory which the Creator would bestow on her by reason of her position in the order of grace.

Yet Mary was happier in her poverty than in her plenitude and was more glorified in her renunciation than in her joys. The rebuffs of her Son, borne with such perfect resignation, were no more a sign of her sanctity than were His caresses. His diversion from her of the praises and honors that men tender her, and all the other privations, absences, or severity which He effected in her life, were necessary for her extraordinary progress in that perfection which was worthy of the exalted Mother of God.

Mary was dead and her life was hidden in God with Jesus her Son. She was dead; but how did she die? She died through Jesus. He was the cause of her dying. She was dead to her relationship with the heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit only poured Himself forth in her heart to bring about in her an agonizing death, a new martyrdom unknown to men, a living death, a dying life. Which shall we admire the more: the life which love effected in Mary's blessed soul in giving her Jesus, who was more her life than was the soul which animated her own body, or the severity He exercised over all the powers of her mind by all the means capable of making her soul a desolate sea of sorrows?

From this we learn that Jesus' words to His apostles: "If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you," 15 applied also to His Blessed Mother. She was not without the Holy Spirit any more than she was without renunciation or the readiness to undergo any privation it might please God to

¹⁵ John 16:7.

send her. As the Holy Spirit took a more complete and direct charge over her heart, He disposed her to newer and greater progress in love, by harsher and more extensive and more radical separations. The Holy Spirit was for her a principle of life and a source of death, a cause of presence and principle of absence, uniting and separating. The same Spirit who gave her Jesus as her only Child took Him away, snatched Him from her, not amid sweetness, but in the extreme sufferings of that same love. At every moment of His life Jesus was dependent upon the Holy Spirit. We must also believe that the same Holy Spirit directed Mary body and soul, exercising her in every way that could perfect her in a great detachment which was consonant with her eminent holiness.

CHAPTER 29 K

At the Foot of the Cross

CHARITY had obtained so perfect a mastery over Mary's soul that it alienated her even from those spiritual and divine things which might have given her perfect joy and consolation. Thanks to her high degree of charity, she had no desire to find pleasure in her will, her understanding, her memory, her choice, her knowledge or anything at all, however pure and perfect. Her soul remained as much at peace when she was being cruelly tried as when she was in the deep raptures of contemplation. She considered Calvary and the stable at Bethlehem as equally indifferent things. Heaven and earth or the cross and glory aroused similar feelings of submission and acceptance in her will. So perfectly resigned was she that her heart remained the same whether she gazed upon the sorrows of her Son or upon His glory. Although God prolonged Jesus' sufferings and increased their number and intensity, she wanted only that the Father be satisfied. Nothing could have caused her greater pain than to depart from the divine plan which she adored as being full of justice and of mercy.

All this was brought about in a marvelous way. As Mary saw her Son on the scales of God's justice—for God will be satisfied in the way He chooses—she suffered pains that only God's Mother could endure. Her inward peace and

serenity did not lessen but rather they augmented the greatness of her sufferings, for she loved the will of God more than she did her own Child. The satisfaction which God derived from Jesus' sufferings, therefore, occupied her whole attention because she could not separate it from the will of God. Her soul was the more capable of feeling pain, since her greatest sufferings and afflictions could not, by inducing a loss of consciousness, deaden the perceptibility of those potencies which were preoccupied with a love stronger than maternal love.

There were two loves in Mary. She loved the life of her Son, cherishing it most of all as a divine life, for He was God. She also loved the death of her Son so far as that was the will of God. No mother ever loved her child as Mary, the holiest of all pure creatures, loved Jesus. As holiness consists in a perfect conformity with God, nothing that pleased God was disagreeable to her. Abraham had infinitely less obedience than she, and yet he was ready to carry out at once the divine command to offer Isaac in sacrifice. If he could overcome the tenderness and strength of a loving father for an only son, what are we to think of Mary's eagerness to carry out the decree of the living Father concerning the life, passion and death of Jesus? Christ loved His own life infinitely, as was proper in justice, and willed to give up that life in order to satisfy His heavenly Father, though it led to that horrible agony which made His soul "sad even unto death." The same two contraries were united in the soul of His Mother.

Mary loved the life of Jesus the more because she had a greater right over it and because the life of Jesus enjoyed such great dignity. She felt most keenly the loss of that life. The nails, thorns, scourge, and cross which destroyed that life she loved so dearly caused her great an-

guish, but she was so resigned to God's will that she was ready to suffer it with a peace and satisfaction of mind befitting a holy love like hers. Great afflictions and great patience filled her soul. Her love for Jesus' life was the cause of her sorrow; her love for His death in accordance with God's will produced in her a marvelous patience. So many and heavy were her sorrows that she would not have been able to bear them had not her resignation to God's adorable decrees sustained her with the efficacious help of grace, which enabled her to welcome the execution of those decrees with constancy, modesty, and firmness.

Thus we see that her love of conformity heightened the feelings which she experienced at the sufferings of her Son and her own loss because of His death. The evangelist portrays her on Calvary at the foot of the cross.1 She did not swoon, as many do when suffering intensely. For our own good, nature provides such things as fainting spells and the like which suspend the workings of our sensitive faculties to prevent those painful impressions from affecting the heart and even causing death. Christ our Savior, consumed by thirst upon the cross after losing so much blood through many cruel wounds, refused to drink the wine mixed with myrrh because it dulled the feelings.2 But the vinegar they offered Him He did drink,3 for it would re-awaken the sensitive faculties. He who wished to endure without relief, scorned everything that could bring relief.

Holy Simeon had said that a single sword of sorrow would suffice for both Jesus and Mary.⁴ Affliction flowed from Jesus' soul into the soul of His Mother. One and the same passion, one cross, one martyrdom afflicted them

¹ John 19:25.

⁸ John 19:30.

² Mark 15:23.

⁴ Luke 2:35.

both. Mary suffered without consolation in imitation of her Son. She did not succumb to her great pain; rather, her senses and perceptibility were strengthened and made painfully aware of what was happening. The word stabat 5 means that she stood, not that she wept.6 Had St. John told us that she wept, we could not say with St. Anselm that her anguish exceeded that of all the martyrs put together.7 In saying stabat, St. John was like the artist who in his painting of the sacrifice of Iphigenia depicted the by-standers with tears in their eyes but subtly drew a veil over the face of her father. He seemed to say that the sorrow expressed by tears is not commensurate to the pain that rends a father's heart at the sacrifice of his own child. Eves that pour forth abundant tears are like the pumps that draw from the hold of a ship the waters which could in the end cause it to sink. Even so, sadness would overwhelm the heart, had not nature provided it with the blessed relief of tears.

Mary shed no tears at the foot of the cross, but suffered without the solace tears might have brought her. She suffered with all the force of her powers, terribly. The acuteness of her pain, far from being dulled or deadened, was supernaturally and miraculously focused upon objects capable of trying them beyond their natural powers of endurance. Her eyes were not dazzled at what they saw; her ears were not deafened amid the confusion and blasphemy; her feet did not falter; her nerves did not get out of control. Delicate as her flesh was, she was not dissolved in the cold sweat which betrays a faint heart. Such was her gravity and confidence that the Jews there present

⁵ John 19:25.

⁶ St. Ambrose, De obitu Valent, (P.L. 159, col. 567).

⁷ St. Anselm, De excell. Virg. (P.L. 159, col. 567).

might have suspected her to be deserving of divine honors, had not Christ publicly addressed her simply as "Woman." Surely she is the valiant woman the Wise Man treasured above all else. The pains she endured went beyond human powers. Without the help of the Holy Spirit she could not have lived amid such sufferings. St. Epiphanius thought she would have died at the foot of the cross in fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy, if the same power which had united her virginity with maternity had not strengthened her.

At the foot of the cross Mary's blessed soul was a perfectly polished mirror, reflecting in detail all the sufferings and pains of her well-beloved Son. This she could not have done so exactly if they had depressed her and troubled her spirit. She stood on Calvary like a palm tree, for she did not yield to suffering any more than the palm tree yields to the weight which is placed upon it. We should not look for the Mother of God here, for we will find only the thorns, nails, and scourges, and the cross. We will see in her soul all the cruelty spent on the spirit and body of Jesus, whose image she bears. The holy prophet Habacuc had written: "The sun and the moon stood still in their habitation; in the light of Thy arrows, they shall go in the brightness of Thy glittering spear. In Thy anger Thou wilt tread the earth under foot; in Thy wrath Thou wilt astonish the nations. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, for the salvation of Thy anointed." 10

Thus we learn that in the days of God's wrath and of the salvation which Jesus won upon this earth, Jesus and Mary, signified by the sun and the moon, stood steadfast, each receiving from divine justice, though in different

⁸ Prov. 31:10.

St. Epiphanius, loc. cit.

¹⁰ Habac. 3:11.

ways, the arrows of desolation and the spears of distress. She did not have to suffer in her body as the Redeemer did, but she felt His pains in her soul more truly than if she had received them in her own flesh. And in order that nothing be lacking in the perfect resemblance between their sufferings, Jesus was abandoned by His Father and Mary was deprived of all consolation. When He was dying on the cross, He did not address her as His Mother. Neither in heaven or on earth, in God or in nature or in her Son, could she find comfort. God was angry, the heavens were overcast, the earth trembled, and nature itself was horrified. Men did their utmost to make her the most miserable woman in the world by the way they treated Him whom she loved. If she thought to act as a dove during this great flood of affliction, to turn her eyes and thoughts toward that mystical Ark to find rest, where could she turn them, for from the bottom of His feet to the crown of His head, no part of Jesus was without pain. And the wounds inflicted upon His spirit were more horrible still than those of His body.

As Jesus was dying upon the cross, He was concerned about His Father and His earthly Mother. Looking up to His Father, He declared Himself to be the most sorely-afflicted Son in the world, saying: "My God, My God, why hast Thou abandoned Me?" Looking down at His Mother, He addressed her as "Woman," the most afflicted creature in all nature. Surrounded as she was with sorrows, He refused to call her by the one name which expressed the relationship between them. He gave her another son and she accepted him with the same resignation that she did everything else, not dreaming of turning her back upon St. John, as Magdalen will turn her back upon the angels who tried to console her.

Jesus treated Mary as His heavenly Father had treated Him. The Father hid from Christ His quality as Father, showing to Him only the countenance of an angry judge. Jesus did not wish to present Himself in Mary's mind as her dearly beloved Son. In calling her "Woman," He required her to imitate His own sublime and sovereign detachment, for He had despoiled Himself of the thought that He was the Son of God to consider Himself as a miserable creature. He calls the Father His God, as if He Himself were His creature; He calls Him Judge, placing Himself on a par with criminals. On the cross Jesus felt double shame; one, in looking upon Himself, and the other when looking at Mary, plunged into a desolation so ill befitting one of her eminent dignity. At the foot of the cross she did not seem to be the Mother of God any more than Christ seemed to be only Son of the living Father. If in His sorry plight He was ashamed to declare Himself the Son of God, He would not call Mary His Mother in the midst of her desolation and shame.

Thus all of Mary's faculties and feelings had to be vigorous and alive. Had they been dulled by the violence of her sufferings, she would have been less aware of her loss. She would also have been less inclined to that perfect detachment which was thereafter to be the means of her further growth in perfection. She would have been less dedicated to the execution of God's will, whose fiat she recognized where Jesus' body and soul were concerned. All His sufferings pierced her soul, just as Simeon had predicted. Divinely united to God in profound contemplation, she more than any other lived "hidden with Jesus Christ in God." While retaining all her senses and powers, she experienced none of those ecstasies or levitation of body, no suspension of vital operations, none of that weakness,

languor, and lethargy of members that saints and contemplatives often do. Nothing like this in the case of Mary, God's Virgin Mother. Although her sorrows went beyond all natural suffering, this did not rob her of her powers of feeling, which were strengthened so as to be able to endure the trials which normally would have destroyed them.

Mary on Calvary exhibited greater constancy than the Mother of the Machabees whose children were martyred before her eyes, more resolution than Abraham had shown at the sacrifice of Isaac, greater steadfastness and perseverance than Respha when Saul's seven sons were affixed to the stake along with her two sons. Mary stood, resolved to die with Jesus if it pleased God to accept her loving oblation. Even here she had no wish but to resemble Christ. She did not think that her death could contribute to our redemption, which was more than sufficiently provided for by His death. But in order to be made like unto Him, she offered up her own life as a sacrifice, as St. Ambrose says.11 She might have derived much comfort from the thought that she was the companion of the cross of her Son, a substitute for the bad thief who by his impatience and incredulity failed to realize the glory of that association with Christ, Mary went to Calvary to learn the will of the heavenly Father in her regard. She was not to be outdone by Abraham in the matter of obedience; she went to Calvary with that disposition of mind required of her by the figure of that holy patriarch. If God had commanded her to carry out with her own hands that crucifixion which an inscrutable Providence had placed in the hands of the wicked, she would have obeyed with all the promptness and resoluteness expected of one perfectly submissive to the laws of the Creator. Nature recoils at

¹¹ In Lucam 23:49 (P.L. 15, col. 1837).

this thought; it is enough that grace adore it, for what God sanctifies is not cruel, wicked, or profane. The fact that the Father was content with her readiness to obey did not lessen Mary's pain, but gave it new material for increase. If God had so willed it, would it not have been better to have it done by holy hands which would have treated Jesus' sacred members with greater respect, reverence and devotion than those of the executioners and pagans who were actually the instruments and ministers of His adorable sacrifice?

When Abraham descended from the mountain, he did not leave his son Isaac behind, but led him back safe and sound, having sacrificed a ram in his stead. Poor Mary! She saw Jesus cruelly affixed to the gibbet, raised aloft, His body covered with wounds and His soul filled with the anguish in which He died.

Abel was wickedly slain by his brother Cain, but God gave Eve another son better than the first. Agar at least was consoled in that she could deliberately withdraw from her son so that she might not have to look upon his death. Nabuchodonosor deemed it a favor to put out the eyes of the unhappy Sedecias, king of Jerusalem, after he had seen his own children put to death before him. The mother of the martyred Machabees suffered intensely in their glorious death, but if we may believe Victorinus, the master of St. Jerome, her sufferings led to her death, or so the Scriptures seem to suggest.

You, O Blessed Virgin, how you have risen above your sex. You outstrip all creatures in sorrow as well as in grandeur and dignity. Your tribulations of spirit were unmatched by those of any other father and mother, because

¹² Gen. 4:25.

¹⁴ IV Kings 25:7.

¹³ Gen. 21.

¹⁵ II Macc. 7:41.

your Son was more deserving than all their children and because your love for Him excelled all other loves, even that of the seraphim! O prodigious miracle of nature and of grace, that your powers and feelings retained their strength and vigor in the midst of death-dealing trials and that you did not succumb, despite sufferings comparable to those of the damned. "Put me as a seal upon your heart," said the Beloved to his beloved, adding that such a love is "strong as death and as hard as hell itself."

CHAPTER 30 K

Lonely Mother

SURPRISING though it may seem, the reaction of those to whom the mystery of the Incarnation was first revealed was one of fear and terror. Elizabeth was struck with astonishment and admiration; ¹ Zachary was troubled, and fear fell upon him; ² St. Joseph himself needed an angel's reassurance; ³ and at the birth of Christ the shepherds feared with a great fear. ⁴ Centuries before the coming of the Son of God, Habacuc the prophet had feared and been afraid when he contemplated so strange a mystery. ⁵ Simeon too was fearful; he had long awaited the redemption of the world and here he was now holding the price of that redemption in his own hands. The wise men of the East, finding Him with His Mother, fell to the earth in His presence. ⁶ Finally, news of it aroused fear and apprehension in Herod and all the city of Jerusalem.

One may be inclined to think that Mary alone remained calm and undisturbed, but St. Luke tells us that she was troubled when Gabriel saluted her and announced that God's Son would become incarnate in her womb.⁷ Her being troubled arose from fear, and Gabriel tried to allay it by telling her not to be afraid.⁸ Why was she

¹ Luke 1:43.

⁴ Luke 2:9.

^{*} Luke 2:9.
7 Luke 1:29.

² Luke 1:12.

⁵ Habac. 3:2.

⁸ Luke 1:30.

⁸ Matt. 1:20.

⁶ Matt. 2:11.

fearful? Was her fear because of awe at the extent of God's love? Was she horrified at the lowly condition God's Son wished to assume? Did she see that divine maternity would make her the cause of the torments He would have to suffer in the nature she would give Him? Was it because she recognized the gulf which existed between His dignity and her disposition for so sublime a ministry? I hold with St. Thomas Aquinas that Mary's fear arose from her profound humility. The archangel had to obtain her consent and this was impossible unless she first gave him her attention. To attract her attention Gabriel had first to draw her mind from its contemplation of the wonders of God, and to do this, he had to startle her in some unusual way. Nothing is so disturbing to a humble person as to be approached with honor and praise.9

Mary indeed feared, and that fear upset and troubled her, as the Church and the Fathers admit. Indeed, who would not tremble at the heavy burden of pain, suffering, privation, separation, and absence which was destined to try the soul of Jesus' Mother? Christ's human nature was united to a divine Person and fortified by uncreated grace, but it could be troubled at the thought of the torments and miseries to which it would be subjected. What struggle then will not try Mary, helped as she was by a lesser grace? She suspected that her predestination to divine motherhood would oblige her to suffer.

One might think that her charity, which throughout her whole life grew in strength and surpassed that of all other creatures taken together, acquired at the death of Jesus all the grace and beauty which put the crowning touch upon her perfection. One might suppose that the termination of her Son's sufferings would have put an

⁹ Summa theol., IIIa, q.30, a.4, corp. and ad lum.

end to her own period of meriting and that after she had seen Him die, one and the same tomb would house both their bodies and one and the same glory would satisfy their souls. But Jesus would not have it so. He separated her from Himself by a distance as great as that which separates the throne and the right hand of God from everything that is mortal, and there He leaves His Mother. So jealous was He of the purity of her sufferings that she was not even to be a witness to His resurrection.

Magdalen and the other women would have the honor of holding the glorified feet of Christ. Two of the disciples who were leaving Jerusalem were consoled by Him. There was no apostle with whom He did not share His presence. I know there are such things as private revelations and I have great respect for the devotion of others, but I leave every man to his own judgment. No one should be shocked, then, especially as the Church has said nothing to the contrary and the evangelists are silent on the point, if I humbly suggest that the Mother of Jesus experienced none of those sensible consolations which would have been hers had she been always present when Jesus appeared to the women and to the apostles during those forty days.

The evangelists and St. Paul are careful to record the apparitions of Christ up to the moment of His ascension into heaven, but they do not include Mary among those to whom He manifested Himself. It may be that they overlooked this detail; they may possibly have deliberately passed over it as being not absolutely necessary. For my part, I feel that Mary's faith had no need of these things. Her great holiness was quite compatible with this privation, and it would not in any way weaken her love if she had no share in the favors granted to those who were lower than she in charity. Her love would not suffer from

that. Her merit grew the more as Her Son changed His lot for the better. Her being separated from Him was exceedingly painful, though it was better for Him to be immortal than to be mortal, to be glorious than to be miserable. If the oft-repeated and consoling appearance of Christ was useful for the Church and even necessary for some, the lack of it could be equally useful in Christ's plan, for He had resolved to be to His Mother, at every period of His life, a cause of separation.

As Jesus went from one period of His life to another, Mary became more perfect and advanced in sanctity, and if holiness spells separation, then she became holier as Jesus deprived her of His presence. Five circumstances of His life showed Him to have been adorable and worthy of love. In the first He was enclosed within the flesh of His Mother; the second extends from His birth to Calvary; the third comprised those few hours He hung upon the cross; the fourth covered the forty days from His resurrection to His triumphant ascension; and in the last period, which is unending, He is seated full of majesty at the right hand of God. In each of these periods He was for His Mother Mary a sword that separated.

Our Lord's special love for Mary did not die when He died and His plan to make her a miracle of sanctity did not end with His mortal life. The immortality He now enjoys seemingly made Him less sympathetic to her sufferings than was right. It seemed that the glory which freed Him from the miseries of this life deprived Him of all human feeling. Mary's affliction was the greater and more difficult to bear because He passed her over in distributing His glory, although He did not refuse it to a thief, an unworthy blasphemer who had just repented of his sins. She heard Jesus promise that in a few hours time such a one would be His companion in Paradise.

I believe with all the faithful that the Risen Christ showed Himself first to Mary. But in this she received nothing more than what was given to penitent Magdalen. One visit was apparently not enough to show Magdalen how much He loved her; so He repeated the visit, filling her with such floods of sweetness that her tears were dried and the sighs and longings of her heart were stilled. When the Blessed Mother saw Jesus, she felt His sufferings still; His passion was graven upon her heart. The splendor of her Son's glory did not dispel the agony in her soul. The glimpse she had of Him during His fleeting visit only sharpened but did not obliterate her sufferings. Just as the glory of the transfiguration served only to heighten Jesus' inner sufferings afterwards, as we have said above, so it was with the desolation in Mary's spirit. The glorious resurrection of her Son filled her with a great joy but almost at once she suffered the pain caused by the removal of that vision. Once a good has been enjoyed, its loss is felt all the more sharply.

Doubtless moved by his generous faith saintly King Louis refused to visit the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, where the people had flocked to see a host in which the form of an infant had appeared. His faith was indeed great and his modesty was no less meritorious. This mortification of his curiosity should be rated above any other victory he ever won over himself. Prostrate in his oratory, he adored in spirit Him whom his subjects had the honor of seeing. He denied to his eyes a happiness known by the apostles and sacrificed at the foot of the altar whatever sensible satisfaction his devotion might have drawn from the sight of that marvel.

Mary was not present when it pleased her Risen Son to manifest Himself in different places to many persons; she did not see what He did or hear what He said, thereby showing her admirable submission to His plan for her sanctification. It was enough for her to know that her Son tasted the joy that was natural to Him and she was happy that He shared it with others. While He was visiting those who had less right but more need of such an honor, she awaited with perfect resignation to see what God in His wisdom had decided was best for her.

The forty days during which Jesus manifested Himself on earth were for Mary only a foretaste of the long privation of His presence which was to be her lot for many years to come, while the door of eternal glory was closed to her. Jesus will make His triumphal entry into Heaven with a glorious band composed of patriarchs, prophets and holy souls since the time of Adam. Mary will daily hear and see how disciples and new converts enter the kingdom of her Son, but she will be denied admission, to remain amid the miseries and vexations of this life. She must be content with crumbs while slaves are seated at His table. She will languish from thirst while servants drink their fill. Jesus will pour Himself out for them, but toward Mary, His Mother, He will act sparingly. For others He will be prodigal; not simply liberal; but for a time He will show Himself not merely thrifty in her regard but avaricious.

Divine Master, will you have less pity on your own Mother than the rich man had on poor Lazarus, and be less compassionate toward her who brought you into the world than that cruel man was toward a stranger? If you led Lazarus to the gate of that rich man in order to bend that heart of iron to mercy, do you not see that Mary's heart is a furnace of desires that can bend Your will to recognize them? You permitted the body of that holy beggar to be covered with sores, listen then to Your Mother, who is wounded by Your love. How many and

deep are her wounds. You strike her and heal her not; cause her to swoon, but take no compassion on her; increase her thirst without quenching it. Her heart tells You that her eyes seek out Yours and that she desires to see You face to face. O Eternal Word, what will You say to her, planning as You do to leave her upon earth while You prefer the happiness of the least in Your Kingdom to her glory? Will You tell her as You did the Canaanite woman, that "it is not right to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs?" She who is humble will not be offended by this reference to that poor woman, especially since she is sustained during Your absence only by the scraps, if I dare so speak, which fall from that table where You serve those honored by Your placing them there. 11

As they look forward to the glory for which they ardently sigh day and night, the saints practice a strong and godlike patience. We wait for that glory with patience, says St. Paul,12 and that the Thessalonians might know the nature and quality of that patience, he besought the Lord that their lives and hearts be directed by the charity which is natural to Him and by the patience of Christ Jesus, His Son. The blessed in glory need an extraordinary help, theology tells us, which elevates and strengthens their intellect so that they may see God directly and immediately. A finite soul could not by its own natural power know an object so far above it; it requires a special light. "In Thy light we shall see light," 13 and this light is what theologians call the light of glory, a participation of the light which constitutes the essential glory of the living God. Millions of torches, lamps, fires, combined with the stars and the moon cannot reveal the sun to us. The sun sends forth a ray of

¹⁰ Ps. 26:8.

¹¹ Luke 12:37.

¹² Rom. 8:25; II Thess. 3:5.

¹⁸ Ps. 35:10.

its own light to make itself visible to us. So also, a divine force is necessary if we are to endure the light of God's glory without being annihilated.

What saint ever had greater right than Mary to the glory of her Son? As His Mother, she had a natural affinity with Him. Why, then, was she not united to Him in His glory? If she shared so intimately in His sufferings, why did she not share His glory to the same extent? How strange that the risen and glorious Jesus should still be Mary's cross. At the foot of the cross her sorrow was more than enough to bring about her death a thousand times. Shall we believe then that her love was less rigorous upon her spirit once Jesus had returned to heaven? Can that love which cannot endure the sufferings of a God bear His absence? If His passion brought with it the sorrows of death, why did His departure from her not entail her death? Would Mary be unmoved if the one she loved above everything else was absent from her?

If the same protection that was necessary to preserve her virginity when she became mother, was also necessary for the preservation of her life amid the great sufferings which the cruel passion of her Son pressed upon her soul, 14 nothing less than that same power was needed to help her resist the assaults and languors of her love when she was deprived of the direct vision of her Son in glory. Once Jesus was seated in full majesty at the right hand of God, the divine Spirit descended visibly. His coming made her more conscious of her loss and more languishing in the ardor of her desire. He united Himself to her lest her love cause her soul to quit her body and fly to Him who drew her so powerfully to Himself. In that heart there was more than

¹⁴ St. Anselm, De excell. Virg. (P.L. 159, col. 567).

enough ardor to separate soul from body. Her love had reached such intensity that without a miracle she could not have continued to live. She had more than enough merit to gain what she loved. She was wholly disposed for joy, not suffering. But the Holy Spirit opened His arms to her and at the same time was unwilling that she embrace Him. He united Himself to her understanding and inflamed her will, only to sharpen her pain because of her separation from her Son. Yet, the Son was treated without pity, what can the Mother expect?

Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would glorify Him by receiving from His abundance.¹⁵ The Holy Spirit cannot receive anything except that which He has received from the Son for all eternity, unless it be His crosses, sorrows, merits, and pains. These He applies to us in the supernatural operations of His temporal mission. Jesus' passion was the principle which merited and obtained that mission for us and it is therefore fitting that the Holy Spirit apply to us the qualities of that source which merited His being sent. Thus, the Spirit brings into our hearts the inclinations and dispositions to suffering.

Jesus once said to the Pharisees that the time would come when the children of the divine Spouse, who neither fasted nor wept while He was among them, would fast and do penance once He had departed from them. 16 He spoke of their being filled with a new wine. 17 The Jews saw the results of this but failed to recognize the cause, for on Pentecost, when the apostles came forth from the Cenacle, they took them to be drunk. If the Holy Spirit was poured forth in the hearts of the apostles to animate them with

¹⁵ John 16:14.

¹⁷ Matt. 9:17.

¹⁶ Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20.

courage and perseverance amid the harsh trials toward which He inclined them, should we not think that He stamped Mary's spirit with a like inclination?

There is, however, a great difference. Their hearts were overwhelmed with joy though their bodies were torn apart in cruel torments. Mary's flesh remained intact; it was her soul that experienced the bitter ministrations of love. Her martyrdom was invisible, but not less painful for all of that. But her torments will not be the cause of her dying; love will cause it. She was the mystical manna melting away before the burning rays of the divine Son; but the Holy Spirit gave her such strength that she would never have died had not her Son come, with a kiss, to receive her soul from her body.

Spiritual Consolations and Desolations

AL



CHAPTER 31 K

The Delights of Holy Love

NO LONG deliberation is needed to decide whether it is worse never to have savored a good or to be separated from it after having experienced its sweetness. The separation will be the more painful as the enjoyment of that good was the more delightful. One born blind is less liable to despair at the thought of never seeing than one whom some accident has deprived of sight after many years of vision. And can we doubt that Christians who have the right to the heritage of eternal happiness regret more keenly the loss of the enjoyment of God than do the pagans who have never known Him?

There is a great difference between the pleasures of earth and heaven. Earthly pleasures are avidly sought by those who have never tasted them, but after a moment's pleasure they cause disgust; heavenly pleasures, on the other hand, arouse an insatiable desire once their delights have been experienced, whereas they awaken no desire in those who do not trouble to be worthy of them. Small wonder that earthly-minded people are not disposed to know them better. Christ forbids that pearls be cast before swine or that holy things be given to dogs.

I therefore think that the loss of divine consolations, the suspension of perceptible graces, interior abandonment, desolation of spirit, and spiritual dryness cause greater distress and torment in holy souls than any other affliction in this life. From the greatness of the consolations to which divine grace calls these souls we may judge the pain that accompanies and follows their loss when, in the wise but inscrutable providence of God, they are abandoned to severe trial. Then they can cry out, with greater reason than Rebecca: "If it were to be so with me, what need was there to conceive?"

Present sufferings are heightened by the memory of past pleasures and if that happiness was accompanied by tender words and caresses, the unhappiness will be so much the more difficult to bear. Present calamities are always heavier when compared with the contentment that preceded them, for man knows misery only by comparison. Thus, to increase the pain of His passion, Jesus would first enter Jerusalem in triumph and later leave it in ignominy to die upon Calvary. He wished His passion to be as full of bitterness as His triumphal entry had been full of solemnity. He wished His sufferings to be sharpened by the contrast between the mob's demand, "Take Him and crucify Him!" and the acclamation, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." He wished the cross to be even less agreeable after the palms, the thorns more piercing after the flowers, and His nakedness more shameful after others had removed their garments and spread them on the ground to honor His entry into Jerusalem. He seems to say as much to the beloved: "I have gathered the myrrh of the torments of My passion along with the perfumes of My joy." 1 Divine consolations are incomparably greater than any possible delight of the senses; their loss is a more severe trial than any that went before.

¹ Cant. 5:1.

St. Gregory Nazianzen once said, in describing God's way of acting in souls which He disposes for the perfection of charity, that holy love is a sweet tyrant. God normally introduces Himself gradually into men's lives by the charms of His caresses and by these means becomes master of their minds and souls. But then His countenance changes, as well as His manner of treating them. He undertakes to make them during this life like Jesus crucified, whose image they must bear before they can attain in heaven perfect conformity with His life of glory. He first caresses and then tests them. He wins them over so that later He may place them on the lists of battle where they will be given many opportunities for victory. He artfully gains their affection by the tender feelings which He arouses in them, to draw from them, in the midst of sharp encounters, proofs of their courage and loyalty.

I do not pretend to understand, nor can anyone, the various ways used by God to withdraw His spiritual consolation from holy souls in order to make them sharers of His cross. This would be to attempt the impossible. Our minds have too little light to be able to understand the ways invented by infinite wisdom for the communication of His graces, nor can they comprehend how He withdraws and suspends them. We may indeed be aware of the presence of a sensible grace, but we know not how it came to us. We know when we no longer have it, although we know neither the hour nor moment that it left us. Since we know its presence and absence only from the effects it produces in the soul, I shall attempt to classify the various crosses and interior abandonments according to the different effects caused by divine consolations, so that by the law of contrast these two extremes will be mutually enlightening.

God alone has the power to prepare a man's heart for the

reception of the graces He deigns to grant him in his progress toward perfection. He draws the soul tenderly but strongly, efficiently but lovingly. The beginning of wisdom, says the Wise Man, is to desire wisdom; indeed, the spiritual perfection of this life is a perfection of desires, of hope, and of inclination. Hence, one should not be surprised that a holy soul becomes accustomed, by long habit and continual or frequent exercise, to lift itself up to God at almost every moment with sighs, flights of the heart, aspirations, and ejaculatory prayers, or that in all the events of life it finds opportunities to unite itself to His supremely lovable goodness. In time the soul seems to become a perpetual prayer, for it turns to God with such ease, promptitude, and ardor that almost without any previous reflection, it projects itself into the immense love of God, which is the glorious center of its desires.

God also gives the soul a loving, free, courageous, and persevering spirit. The day is too short for its devotions and the night brings no end to the exercise of its fervor. It rises from prayer more vigorous than it was before and, imitating the life of the blessed, its desire to be occupied with God is unslackened, despite the unbroken continuity of its exercise. The violence of its ardor is not abated by its duration, the difficulty of the struggle, the effort of the race, or the vexing incidents which the soul encounters. Such spirits do not walk; they fly like the eagle.

To attempt to arrest the movements of such souls would be like trying to chain the wind or to breast a downrushing torrent. There is no room here for prudence to operate; it must step aside. Spiritual directors confess that their judgment must yield to a greater Master, and wise men affirm that it would be an impious and insolent presumption to attempt to lay down laws for the Almighty, whose omnipotence is unlimited and whose immensity of being is changeless. Devout souls understand that it would be sacrilegious to try to oppose the outpourings of God's abundant grace or the overflowing infusion of His Spirit. St. Paul assures us that such persons are already marked as the well-beloved among the children of the glorious Trinity.²

While the Holy Spirit vivifies, activates, touches, and transports these souls, they wish to surpass the angels and the seraphim in the violence, ardor, and swiftness of the loving flight to which they dedicate themselves with a sweeping renunciation of any kind of refreshment. Spiritual progress does not satisfy them, and all their past victories and glorious conquests, far from contenting them, are but so many reasons for lamenting the infinite distance which separates them from the perfection to which they aspire with a truly magnanimous courage. Their acquisition of virtue serves to increase their yearning and stimulate their desire; the extent of their desire dilates their heart and renders it capable of receiving new graces.

In this state one recalls that the measure of the love of God in this life is to love Him without measure, to love Him without limits, to the full capacity of one's powers and strength, and this leads to ecstasy of the will. As ecstasy of the intellect occurs when it is so occupied in the contemplation of objects that surpass the senses that it is blind to anything, however attractive, that is inferior to the object of its attention, so ecstasy of the will occurs when all its desires, feelings, and affections find their death and tomb in a life whose one purpose is to acquire the purity, spotlessness, and holiness of the love of God. This love arouses in the will an insatiable hunger and thirst which cannot be completely satisfied in this world.

² Rom. 8:14.

Although everything may be changed and altered around such souls, they never lose a particle of the fervor of their hopes. The impossible is where they begin; the difficult is their element; contradiction serves but to test them. They find happiness where despair leads others to a racking misery. Reason does not govern them, but love. Small wonder, then, if their gaze is fixed more on the end than the means by which it is attained. Why look for reason, they would say, when charity presses? Why ask to reason things out, when the affections are so vehement? Let prudence be silent when a fervent holy love takes command; when zeal gives the orders, let human prudence be resolutely set aside. Fear has no power over desires like these and the honor due the King is absorbed by the ravishing love which impels them toward Him.

It is true that spiritual directors can regulate the external actions of such souls, for it is their duty to draw up laws governing their exterior works, to discover ways to preserve custody of the senses, to direct their public acts of virtue, to temper their bodily austerities, and sometimes to command them to stop. Very often the one directed will think that this is enough or even too much. The flesh may complain, not without some justice, that it can do no more; then prudence, out of human compassion, must display a kindly condescension. One could readily pity a person reduced to such a state, for it is not enough to have in hand the flaming sword of zeal; it requires the wisdom of a cherubim to know how to use it, lest fervor, lacking knowledge and prudence, degenerate into a dangerous fury and the most zealous actions display regrettable symptoms of frenzy.

The desires which holy love has aroused in the will are of such a nature that no judgment, counsel, or command of men or of angels can establish order and moderation. This authority is proper to God alone, who has reserved to Himself only two rights over the will of every rational creature: the first in regard to the principle of movement of their will, so that He alone can put it into motion; the second in regard to the end of its desires, which He alone can fulfill and satisfy.³ He who is the effective cause of our desires knows also the end they should reach. It is by His power that they exist and it is from His adorable reason that they receive their regulation and determination. This is what Jesus meant when He said that the Spirit breathes where He wills,⁴ for we do not know whence the Spirit comes or where He goes.

The beloved assures her Bridegroom that even the young maidens love Him greatly.⁵ They are referred to as young maidens because such fervor is often communicated to beginners, although it is not always a certain criterion of one's progress in the spiritual life. Considering their strength, one could say that they love too much, but judging by the laws which the Holy Spirit establishes in them, the flames of love which He enkindles in them, and the relation between their limited will and the extent to which He deserves to be loved, they can never say of their love that it is enough.

While such souls die once from abnegation and self-annihilation, they would prefer to die many deaths, filled with greater opprobrium, pain, and horror than the death their divine Master willed to suffer for them. If Jesus suffered so ignominious a death, what sort of death should His slave suffer? If innocence wished to be persecuted by the wicked, to what extremes of punishment should a criminal be condemned? If there were a scourging more bloody than that of Jesus, a pain sharper than that of His crown

⁸ Ps. 102:5.

⁴ John 3:8.

⁵ Cant. 1:2.

of thorns, a suffering more cruel than that of the cross, or an agony that inflicted greater desolation on a soul deprived of all human and divine assistance, they would wish it for themselves. Horrible though it be to say it, they would desire in their fervor to be consumed by the vengeful fires that constitute a place of torment for the damned, should it please the Spirit who governs them to lead them there. They feel that there, surrounded by the rage and despair of the damned, they would continue to bless God amidst all those blasphemies, and by the infinity of their great acts of love, they would make up for all the hatred and envy of the damned. Thus their love would triumph over the most painful demands of God's vengeful justice and they would bear witness that love is stronger than death and that holy emulation is as cruel as hell.

Such was the disposition of St. Ignatius, the disciple of St. John. He was conducted from Antioch to Rome along stretches of road as trying as they were long and the soldiers who guarded him were more like fierce tigers than human beings. Ignatius, however, was not content to manifest an invincible heart in the face of the trials, weariness, and other inconveniences that accompanied the last voyage of one marked like a criminal for capital punishment, although these sufferings might well have overwhelmed even the most generous souls. Instead of begging the soldiers to moderate their excessive harshness toward him, he accused them of indifference and urged them not to slacken that cruelty which was the prelude to his martyrdom. He wanted them to be progressively less considerate of him. He rejoiced much in the thought that his body would be exposed to lions and leopards whose teeth, like so many mills, would grind his bones and flesh into a flour that could be made into a bread pleasing to God. He was unmoved by the thought of torture or the rack or the scaffold; he yearned for the wheel, the stake, the breaking of bones. The horrible tortures devised by wicked men brought only delight to his mind. And when it seemed to him that these barbarous and pitiless men would not fully satisfy his boundless will to suffer, he turned toward hell to summon its horrible ministers that they might exercise upon his body the dreadful afflictions of that horrible place.

CHAPTER 32 K

Contemplation a Source of Consolation

SINCE every exercise of holy love is fulfilled and perfected in the movement of the heart toward God, in whom it will ultimately experience the happy transformation which is proper to divine love, it is necessary that the loving soul approve the good that it discovers in God before it can elicit those generous acts of benevolent love which cause the insatiable desires of which we have previously spoken. In so doing, the soul knows sweet pleasures and ravishing joys because it is satisfied more with God's happiness than its own proper good. The soul concentrates upon rejoicing in God's infinite perfections. The reason for its joy is not that God can console or aid it, but that His adorable perfections are intrinsic to the immensity of His being and inseparable from the immutability of His nature. If the soul contemplates His omnipotence, it rejoices only because God's infinite power frees Him from fear, pain, and anxiety; because there is nothing that can alter God's happiness or resist His will; because no one would dare encroach upon His glory or the goods that He possesses of Himself and which no one can take from Him, lessen, or change; and

because God has no need of men or angels or any creature for His own happiness or to make Him more glorious and majestic. The soul is ravished at the thought that all creatures are so absolutely subject to God's adorable will that they have no being, life, or operation except through their necessary and intrinsic dependence upon its loving influence and is greatly consoled by the fact that the devils and the wicked, for all their presumptuous efforts against His name, are nothing but feebleness itself.

In admiration at this uncreated wisdom, the soul cries out: "O God, inscrutable abyss in which are contained all the treasures of wisdom and the marvels of knowledge, all happiness be Yours, for nothing can be hidden from Your understanding. Before it the abysses are laid bare and darkness is manifest. Night flies before Your light and where You shine there is no room for ignorance. You penetrate the darkest night of consciences, and the most intimate secrets of hearts and recesses of souls are never hidden from You. You can learn nothing from anyone, for You are the sun; You alone comprehend the infinity, immensity, immutability, and eternity of Your being."

Since the attributes of divine wisdom, omnipotence, mercy, justice, and simplicity are ineffable properties of God's sovereign goodness and essential perfections worthy of His grandeur, which they glorify in a most incomprehensible manner, the holy soul moved to mystical sentiments is not satisfied to consider these attributes separately but, plunging into the immense sea of those perfections which, according to our way of thinking, compose the unity of God's omniperfection, it unites them all into one supreme goodness and says: "That is what You are, Beloved, and such is Your perfection. It is not something distinct from You, not an accident which can be separated from the

infinity of Your being nor a property which makes You good by adding to You, but it is Your nature to be good by essence and Your being is infinitely perfect goodness."

The more the soul contemplates the divine grandeurs, the better it understands that God's perfections are not so many additions to His grandeur nor so many partial forms or unrelated perfections which blend to make one supreme perfection in God. It also understands that His sovereign goodness contains in its simplicity all the perfections which are knowable by inferior intellects only through the multiplication of ideas and forms.

One of the most powerful factors for captivating devout souls is the ease with which the ineffable goodness can be approached in spite of its immutability. Not subject to change, it remains always the same and everywhere equal, yet there is nothing in the whole world that can be approached so easily or which allows itself to be gained so readily. There are no sins so malicious or numerous as to weary it; no criminal ingratitude however despicable that can arouse in it the slightest coldness. Most ravishing of all, in the midst of the most severe chastisements it is manifested to the best advantage.

"Your justice, O God," exclaims the devout soul, "in no way detracts from the ineffable sweetness and naturalness of Your goodness. If You inspire terror in hell, and if You command that the vengeful flames produce the heat of despair and rage which makes this place a place of torments, is it not because You are good? The severity of Your justice protects Your adorable and lovable goodness, and from that goodness come the maladies, persecutions, martyrdoms, temptations, aridities, privations and other afflictions of body and soul which are called evils only because of the perverse will of wicked men."

Contemplation a Source of Consolation 207

Thus a holy soul, meditating on the infinite attributes contained in the inscrutable immensity of God's divine being, rejoices greatly in seeing that they would not be supremely adorable if they served any other purpose than to glorify His goodness, in which they all form a perfectly simple, absolute, universal, and necessary perfection. The generation of the uncreated Word, the spiration of substantial Love, the divine operations, and the sweet but strong direction of an infallible providence, all have their source in the wondrous fecundity of God's boundless goodness. The birth, sufferings and death of Jesus, His resurrection and the splendor of His glorified humanity are a manifestation, though not complete and perfect, of God's goodness. Jesus Himself says that God alone possesses that perfection fully.¹

Thus do holy souls plunge themselves into a profound contemplation of God's infinite riches and perfections, sometimes considering them one by one, sometimes all together. They study the various aspects of His beauty to discover ever greater reasons for loving Him and to increase the fire of their love and the insatiable flames of their zeal. Not that they seek rest in Him as a good that brings them pleasure, but they terminate all their joy and pleasure in Him whom they love and contemplate only because He is in Himself perfectly happy and self-sufficient. They find their happiness in the assurance that their Beloved is filled with all good things, that His goodness is immense, His grandeur infinite, His nature all-powerful, His being eternal, His providence characterized by mercy and justice, and all of His perfections concentrated in a perfect unity to constitute perfect goodness.

As the contemplation of this adorable and lovable good-

¹ Mark 10:18.

ness increases and becomes stronger, so also does the soul's delight. The will is dilated and fortified by a loving joy which is aroused by the recognition that God is God, His goodness is immense, His attributes infinite, His splendor unlimited, His riches inexhaustible, His joy unalterable, His glory immutable, and His being eternal. Such a soul is indifferent to life or death, heaven or earth, honor or ignominy. All things else matter little, as long as the Beloved is known to live a glorious life filled with a joy and happiness that cannot be diminished. It is enough for the loving soul that He who is loved above all things and in whom the soul lives more truly than in itself has in Himself, by His very nature and essence, everything that could make Him sovereignly happy.

Ravished by the grandeur of its Beloved, the soul wills that He be supremely happy, that He be God, and that His goodness be all that it is because He is worthy of it. If He were capable of losing one of His perfections, the soul would be prepared to sacrifice life, honor, virtue, and all its energy to preserve it for Him. And since there is nothing that the soul can wish for Him, because His majesty surpasses in perfection the most extravagant desires of all His creatures,2 the soul must have recourse to conditional or imaginary hopes. It gives itself over to desires which are prompted by its own impotence, by God's great merit, and by the deep impression that God has made upon its understanding and will. If God were capable of receiving some good which He lacked, the soul would, in order to obtain it for Him, expose itself to the greatest perils and dangers and even the loss of its own being and everything that it held most dear in this world. If it were possible that the loss of its own glory could increase God's glory, the soul

² Exod. 33:19.

Contemplation a Source of Consolation 209

would gladly say with Moses: "Erase my name from the book of life," or like St. Paul it would wish to be anathema. If its death could lend luster or splendor to the eternal life of its Beloved, it would wish to die at every moment and to be reborn immediately so that with its first breath it could die again for Him. If, by losing its mind, the incomprehensible Wisdom it adores could be increased, it would be happy to fall into delirium and madness. If by its infirmities there were some way of enriching God's omnipotence, or if by its ugliness and deformities it could add new beauty to the immensity of the divine nature, it would envy Job his festering sores and would yearn inconsolably for the rottenness that ate away at the bones of the prophet Habacuc. If any creature possessed some good in the order of nature or of grace which was not contained in the immensity of God's perfections, it would wrest it forcibly from that creature and bestow it upon Him whom it cannot love unless He possesses all perfections.

One such soul regretted that it had not been able to anticipate eternity and was filled with confusion at having been first loved by God from all eternity. It wept bitterly at the thought of all the hours and minutes of past centuries in which it had not been able to manifest the proper adoration and respect due to God. The transport of its love was so vehement that the soul could not realize that such desires are exaggerated nor could it correct such thoughts. As a result, the soul desired something that it is not lawful to desire, namely, to put aside its essential and incommunicable glory and give it to Him absolutely, preferring to be deprived forever of all good than that God should not possess all those perfections which make Him infinitely lovable. The soul says: "You are God and I am a creature, but if I could become what You are, I would soon change my

condition and give all to Him to whom I wish all the good that is due to Him."

Some will declare this to be impossible and will censure the impertinence of the ardor that prompts such desires. But they should remember that great love is not lessened by that which sets it on fire. If these wishes were feasible, the soul would find repose in realizing them, but since this is impossible, the soul feels that it must at least testify to the strength of its desires while being powerless to effect them and manifest its generosity by wishing to do the impossible.

However, the impossible does not satisfy love and difficulties bring it no remedy. If it does not realize the goal of its desires, this may be a cause of death for the loving soul. If such souls are charged with folly or declared to be mad, it is a madness that is a wholly divine sanity. They wish to repay as best they can the infinite love whereby they participate in God's infinity, and since their desires are capable of increasing to infinity, it is not surprising that their ardor outstrips their power and their judgment and reason do not control the intensity of their ardor. Moreover, as their generous love increases through exercise, the soul is ultimately so overwhelmed by the splendors of the divine perfections and so convinced of the impossibility of its desires that it acknowledges that it can contribute nothing to the incomprehensible immensity of God, for His infinite perfection surpasses the thoughts and hopes of men and of angels. This leads it to a new joy, for now the soul rejoices in its own impotency.

Who can describe the joy of such souls as they contemplate the infinite treasures of God's perfection? If our pleasure increases in proportion as a friend is dearer to us and enjoys a more perfect good, doubtless their pleasure must

Contemplation a Source of Consolation 211

be the greater as the object of their love surpasses all imagining. God's incomparable goodness and all the happiness that goes with it penetrates their mind more and more deeply and their joy is all the greater because they rejoice in God's happiness rather than in their own. With loving avidity they draw to themselves the excellence of the perfections they admire and make their own the joy that flows from them, although they do not dwell on this joy as something proper to themselves but as a joy proper to the sovereign goodness. The more they try to abstract from their own personal happiness in the ineffable joy which God has in His infinite perfections, the more they increase their consolations. By this loving act they share in those goods in which the living God takes eternal pleasure.

CHAPTER 33 K

Meditation on God's Perfections

SINCE the loving soul cannot desire or think of anything that might add to God's perfections, it concentrates upon praising Him unceasingly for His great majesty, loving Him who is so lovable and serving the King who merits infinite service and honor. As it savors more and more the sweetness of divine love, its powers contract and expand, expending themselves in acts which correspond to the impression made upon the soul by the contemplation of God. This explains its impetuous and apparently unreasonable desire to have as many hearts as there are grains of sand in the sea, each of them aglow with a love as ardent as that of the highest seraphim and to have a will like God's own in order to love Him as He deserves. Then the soul's love would be infinite in splendor and immense in its extent, its affections would be eternal, and its will would be all-powerful to perform the services that would proclaim the glory of God.

Such souls wish they could melt and dissolve or be poured out on the earth like a libation, so that their desire to acknowledge their strict dependence upon the sovereignty of God would be satisfied. Some experience such an intense internal fire that their very breathing threatens to make of them a flame of joy which will reduce them to ashes so that they can be cast to the winds in honor of the Creator. Or a soul may call upon its Beloved to fulfill the purpose for which He came down from Heaven, reminding Him of His own words: "I have come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" Then, its petition heard, a subtle, sharp, and penetrating flame completely fills the soul, so that it cries out: "I can stand no more; I am dying." The soul would make of the body a votive lamp, burning for all eternity, exhaling an agreeable perfume before the exalted Majesty whom the angels adore, and distilling as delightful vapors its loving despair at being unable to love, bless, and honor Him who is above the praise, blessing, and honor of creatures.

One would wish to have a thousand inward eyes to contemplate Him, an unlimited number of hearts and wills to love Him, countless tongues to praise Him, and many lives to be expended for His glory. The soul longs to make Him perfectly known and loved not only by pagans, heretics and sinners but, impelled by its desire to praise the divine goodness and love God in a manner exceeding its power, it would have the stars, the heavens, angels, fish, water, birds, fire, hail and mist, and every inanimate thing be given the power to know and love, so that all creation, in union with the just and the blessed, might form a single choir chanting the praises and blessings which would magnify Him who deserves all glory.

As the taste of God's goodness reveals His sweetness all the more and as the soul is the more deeply and lovingly moved by it, the love of benevolence vehemently forces the will outside itself, so that it can pay Him the respect and honor that is rightfully His. And because the soul is convinced by its own experience that the entire universe is incapable of doing this, it cannot end its efforts to make God honored, blessed, praised, loved, and magnified more and more. The vehemence of its fervor deprives the soul of its judgment and reason, and rather than put a halt to its desires, it urges them on. If it were possible and not contrary to divine justice, it would turn the blasphemy of the damned into benedictions, their rage into fervor, their despair into devotion, and the cruel flames that devour them into fires of charity. When, however, the holy soul reflects upon the way the eternal decrees are carried out, it rejoices a thousand times over that the goodness of God is satisfied by the punishment of those who had, alas, scorned Him. At the same time it is sick unto death that its own acts of gratitude, love, and service cannot surpass or equal in number or intensity, the blasphemies, hatred, and curses of the damned.

As a result, the soul recollects itself vigorously and arouses new flames of love with such ecstasy that it must cry out: "O sovereign and eternal Goodness! O incomprehensible Wisdom! O adorable Majesty! Since You are my Father, when shall I be worthy of a favor which has no equal among all Your graces? The happy moment will come when I shall embrace You with a love that is both sweet and strong. Should not a creature as vile and wretched as myself fear this infinite Majesty? Will not the greatness of His glory overwhelm me and cause me to tremble in His presence, aghast at those inscrutable judgments, so just and so full of wisdom? What consideration could ever influence my will at the cost of obedience to the divine will, which is its own reason, justice, and law? O spotless mirror of all the virtues! When shall I reproduce in my soul the divine models of humility, patience, meekness, charity, obedience, and modesty? If You are my Father, should I not be dutiful and respectful? If You inspire fear in the angels,

should I not fear? If You are my Master, should I not serve? If You abide in my heart as in Your sacred and glorious temple, should I not possess the purity, dispositions, and affections worthy of so great a Guest? Where is the holiness that will oblige Him to remain and find His pleasure in this temple? O life of the saints and glory of the blessed! O eternal sweetness, will You never bind all my faculties or capture all my feelings so that I may be rendered completely insensitive to the attractions and pleasures of the body? O King and Sovereign, will You not rule over my heart so completely that the concupiscence which unceasingly tempts me to rebel against You will be held in subjection and all that is mine will die to me and be no longer mine but Yours, subject to Your divine and adorable dispositions? Shall I never see myself so filled with Your plenitude that I am transformed into You?"

After having been absorbed for a time in admiration of the divine perfections, the soul terminates these aspirations which had been prompted by generous love and humbles itself by an honest and sincere consideration of the imperfections, defects, and malice which it recognizes in itself. These it multiplies and magnifies in proportion to the esteem, admiration, ecstasy, love, joy, and benevolence which it experienced in the contemplation of God's excellence. What goodness in God and what malice in His creature! Comparing the one with the other, the soul cries out: "Who are You and who am I? Power and weakness! Love and coldness! Great liberality and base ingratitude! Who has ever been more deserving of the title of Father or has shown more love, more tenderness, and more providence? And yet was ever a child less worthy of being His child or was ever a prodigal more wanton and lost than I? You are crowned with immortality and clothed in glory; I am in rags and tatters and covered with misery. Instead of consecrating my life to the hallowing of Your name, I only profane it sacrilegiously."

Sometimes, instead of reflecting on itself, the soul may fix its gaze upon Jesus, its Master. Who can describe the tender love and compassion which such a contemplation begets? Comparing His divinity with His humanity, His lowliness with His grandeur, His perfections with the weakness of His assumed human nature, His misery with His glory, and His sufferings with His happiness, the soul cannot contain itself but falls into a loving swoon. Unable to comprehend the union of such diverse extremes and being deeply moved by His wonders, the soul meditates on the many paradoxes in the life of Jesus: He who is exalted above the heavens is born in a miserable stable: He who is eternal becomes mortal: He who is immutable becomes capable of suffering; He who is infinite is wrapped in swaddling clothes; He who is the consolation of the angels lies amid the beasts; He who is the joy of the saints, weeps; the majesty of God is trodden under foot by men; the Creator is subjected to the imperfections of His creatures; the eternal beauty of God now resides in our ugly mortality; and God dies amid the horrors of the cross. Discovering the cause of His death in the sins of men and the love of God. the soul is filled with displeasure at the former and plunges deeply into a consideration of the latter, which it can neither understand nor fathom.

Since the object of the soul's contemplation has altered in appearance and is changed into great sufferings and sorrow, the compassion of the loving soul increases in proportion as its love of complacency had increased in the contemplation of God's perfections. The soul is as incapable of numbering the horrible evils endured by Christ as it was of comprehending God's grandeur; hence, it is overwhelmed by compassion and an afflicted love. The realization that Jesus suffered insupportable pain saddens the devout soul and causes it to faint away with anguish. And because love makes lovers equal, how could a loving soul which had thrilled with happiness over the goods of its Spouse, fail to experience anguish when it sees in Him an abyss of sorrows and a world of suffering? Indeed, its horror at His pains is the stronger in proportion as the love of benevolence had made a greater impression upon its understanding and will.

The blending of sufferings and grandeur in the Beloved causes a mixture of sorrow and joy which, by a kind of reciprocity, vie with one another, amid transports delightfully painful and painfully delightful, to strengthen love. And since the cause of the loving compassion is the same as the cause of complacency and the love of benevolence. namely, the immense and incomprehensible perfection of God's goodness, the holy soul is beside itself at what this produces in Jesus Christ. When all its efforts and ardent desires fail to satisfy the soul in its love for God, it begins to rest in its own insufficiency. In the vigorous flight of its spirit it embraces all creatures of nature and grace and glory, including Mary or the soul of Jesus, and plunges them and itself into the infinity which alone is capable of loving and praising God as perfectly and fully as He deserves. The soul is silent in His presence and rejoices that all its praise, hopes, loves, and transports are absorbed in God's essential glory. Ashamed of the infinite difference between its insignificant operations and those of God, it rests in the simple thought that God's immense being is sufficient unto Himself both as regards merit and reward, grandeur and praise, goodness and love.

CHAPTER 34 K

Effects of Spiritual Consolation

THE holy soul remains like a motionless instrument in the presence of its Beloved and while it is complacent in the face of the insufficiency which suspends its activity, its faculties become wonderfully disposed for the impressions of supernatural love which gives them greater satisfaction than anything they could ever do by their own power. This love is a unitive warmth which unites the contemplative soul with God its Spouse so that it no longer looks upon itself as something separate from Him. It feels, understands, and savors only the very subtle and penetrating seizure of unitive love which by its ineffable operation consumes it, so that it no longer takes any account of life or death, of body or soul, of heaven or hell. It is so mightily caught up and vanquished by the force of this love that it can hardly contain itself, so enraptured are its faculties with this divine experience.

Such persons often cannot remain still. They behave oddly and their posture, manners, and appearance undergo such a change that one might think them mad. Like St. Peter they know not what they say; like St. Paul they are not sure if they are in the body or out of it, whether they

see God by an image or contemplate Him as He is in His own proper species, whether they themselves move or are moved by God, whether it is they who act or whether they suffer a divine activity. Their animal nature swoons beneath the abundant consolation which this love pours into their soul and their body trembles under the impetuous outpourings of supernatural graces into the soul.

At other times these persons will call out, uttering cries punctuated by sighs, sobs, and tears which arise from a joy and exultation that surpass human endurance. Or they may only babble and stammer or make a noise like one who drinks too much water too quickly. At other times, unmindful of where they are or in whose company, they may burst forth in sad laments, because they can find no palliative for the flames that cause these strange transports. Sometimes they dance about as David did before the Ark. If they become aware of what they are doing, they are amazed that everybody else is not seized or agitated by similar feelings. They would be happy to find others who suffer as they do. They would join with them and would go from one end of the world to the other, impressing the same feelings on the minds of all who should meet them on the way. Ask them who they are, they weep. Ask them what they want, and they look at you piteously, without speaking. Only their eyes talk to you, showing that whatever affects them arises from an unknown cause, in which nature has no part. When they attempt to kneel, they are raised from the earth. If they lie upon the floor, their whole body shakes. They therefore flee the company of men and seek out solitary places, preferring secrecy and distance from men, most of whom criticize them because they have had no personal knowledge of these extraordinary phenomena.

Such agitated behavior is a manifestation of the over-

powering sweetness of supernatural love which floods the heart and sensitive faculties like a torrent and with such vehemence that the soul feels itself encompassed by the arms of its divine Spouse. In His adorable bosom it knows a contentment which in every way surpasses all the pleasures of earth, even were these to be fused together and enjoyed all at the same time.

Amid these sweet and holy consolations God pours Himself into the heart inflamed with the ardor of His love. The soul which is thus favored appears to be supernaturally inebriated because of the abundant infusion of loving favors, tastes, and the delightful sweetnesses of holy love which the heart receives. Not only is the soul unable to retain and digest them; it does not even dare desire them. They produce such an insatiable longing for the enjoyment of God that the soul realizes that it is all too narrow and tiny to contain a flood like this. As a result, the abundant graces overflow into the sensitive powers and the ardent flame of divine love, fomented and increased by the excess of consolations, is manifested by external phenomena, however much one tries to hide them. In this respect the soul resembles the apostles, who appeared to be drunk once they had received the Holy Spirit.

Some souls are assailed so strongly and vigorously that their heart seems to be on the point of breaking at any moment. Their love is like a strong new wine enclosed in an airtight cask which will explode unless a vent is made for it. Sometimes love grows with such joyous profusion that the soul is constrained to say with the rich man in the Gospel: "I will tear down my granaries and build bigger ones." One saint was forced to exclaim: "O God, it is enough, it is too much, I can stand no more. Unless You cease Your sweet and generous giving, I shall die." Again: "Dilate my

heart, increase the capacity of my soul, and widen the scope of my powers." The seraphic St. Catherine of Siena experienced all this, and when her heart broke, another was given her. The supernatural manner in which God gives His divine consolation is so completely beyond our comprehension that one who has not experienced it cannot understand how the love of God can yet increase, so completely is the soul filled, satisfied, and overflowing with that love.

These loving assaults induce no anxiety of mind, inflict no injury upon the system, and are not accompanied by pain, dizziness, or madness. They have nothing in common with those emotional attacks which often surprise a person, causing depression and robbing it of serenity so that it cannot find peace in itself. Spiritual directors should generously and judiciously place their wisdom at the disposal of beginners who are inexperienced in such sensitive movements, to which they often give more attention than they deserve, as if they have found there the secret of solid, generous devotion. Otherwise it is possible that through lack of direction they may fall into regrettable dissipation and then their spiritual directors will not be excused when they stand before the tribunal of divine justice, for God will hold them responsible for the irreparable loss suffered by these souls or will reproach them for the little progress these souls have made, simply because no one had distinguished for them what was of nature and what was of grace.

We shall now speak of other kinds of assaults and movements which differ from those described. In these the holy soul never loses its interior peace, because it pays no attention to what goes on outside itself. Engulfed in the delectable fire of divine love, it understand nothing but this love, which seems to melt the very marrow of its bones. It cannot control its body because it is so strongly and ravishingly possessed by love. It feels that it no longer belongs to this world, because it does not now perform its operations with attention as it did previously nor does it act as others do. It can no longer remember or care about anything, not even those things which concern itself. It is as if all things, the soul included, were no longer in the world. Henceforth the love of God is not so much a means of union as the object and term of union; it cannot separate its love from its object nor the object from its love, which is so great that the soul is unable to see or feel anything but love.

It would be time wasted to impose upon such a soul a task that would oblige it to remain immobile and deprived of feeling. If it were capable of answering questions concerning that which it experiences, the soul would answer that it is a love which transcends its spirit. Then, correcting its thought, it would declare that this was not a true picture of what it felt at all, but that after multiplying grandeur upon grandeur and excess upon excess, it would still seem to be a lie in comparison with the true grandeur and excess of love which it experiences. As a result, the soul would be willing to march toward death through fire; it would not recoil from any pain to realize this end; and amid the most cruel tortures, the malice of men and demons would be vanquished by the love into which the soul is divinely transformed. Moreover, although it suffer many adversities, it does not consider them as things contrary to its will, but as intimately connected with its love. It cannot even understand how hell could torment a soul, except that hell would mean being deprived of so incomparable a love. It recognizes no other hell than that which is an enemy to love, and since the only offense against the infinitely lovable God is such an enemy, hell and its pain seem to this soul to be delightfully refreshing when compared to the thought of sin. The mere knowledge of its own malice seems to be as incompatible to its life as the facial vision of God Himself.

No rebellion disturbs its body or its animal nature. There is no shrinking back. Everything is completely subject to the soul, so much so that the painful incidents which are so annoying to the sensitive part of man serve only to glorify the trials which are sent from heaven to test the soul or which the soul imposes upon the body in the form of penance or satisfaction. Heart and flesh thrill more with pleasure in the living God than they suffer pain on the wheel, the scaffold, or the rack. No indignity can disturb such a soul; no reproach can trouble it. It cares little if the sins of its past life are made known; it would confess them publicly with greater alacrity and pleasure than an ordinary man would sing his own praises. Mortification and humiliation are its element. During its divine inebriation it loses the internal suffering it formerly experienced when others perceived the extraordinary graces with which God had honored it, and now renders a very exact account of these things to its superiors or spiritual director.

CHAPTER 35 K

Ecstasy of Holy Love

WELL might the angels inquire of a soul led to the heights of the perfect love of God: "Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights?" Compared to the delights which flow from the exercise of holy love, that which is most pleasant and delightful in the world is but unhappiness and sorrow. The love of God so enriches a soul that all other riches become pure misery. So light does the soul become that while under the influence of love, it does not even know if it is the earth that it feels beneath its feet. Many steps lead to this summit of love and at every step the soul finds an increase of love. Works afford it rest, for in it the soul finds the end of its torments of love. Punishments attract it because in them its fervor is satisfied and it deems itself blessed, finding therein the supreme perfection which it seeks in this world.

In everything that concerns or touches or surrounds the soul, it experiences only love. Although it is always exercising the virtues, it is not so much a practice of humility, patience, modesty, mortification, or some other virtue as it is the exercise of love itself. All the virtues are fused and transformed into love, which gives the soul so keen an awareness of the presence of the Beloved that it is wholly transformed into the desire to possess Him. His infinity,

eternity, goodness, and beauty, which He reveals to the soul, increase its longing that He satisfy the soul. The glowing fire that burns in its heart causes a yearning that soon becomes a living flame of love. Now it seems to the soul that it is plunged into a sea of love in which it swims like a fish in water. At another time it perceives that God causes a torrent of love to descend upon it with such force that, aware of its inability to resist, it allows itself to be carried along by the swift current to its source, and there, finally, to lose and surrender itself. Again, the soul feels itself so weakened by the fiery rays which, like so many darts and arrows or bolts of lightning, penetrate its very core, that it feels as if it is about to die of the raptures of love's delight. Or it may feel that its holy Spouse is bombarding it with globes of fire or that it is being treated like Elias, whose father dreamed that he saw him fed with flames of fire. At other times the soul feels that its heart is like that of St. Augustine, which artists have depicted glowing with flames and pierced by a divine lance. St. Teresa saw a seraphim pierce her heart with a fiery lance, and when he withdrew it, she was so filled with a desire for God that she cried out: "I am wounded. This holy love is killing me."

Once a holy soul is wounded by the arrows of so sweet and painful a love, it does not know what is the matter or what it wants, although it knows full well that it wants God and that this desire makes everything on earth, however delightful, seem full of bitterness. No matter how excellent creatures may be, they cannot attract a heart thus wounded unless they can help it achieve its desire. "Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth? I adjure you to tell me." Even angels may be displeasing to the soul, as was the case with Mary Magdalen, for when she sought her Master near the tomb, she turned her back on the angel. The sweet languor

of her desire and the deep wound of love in her heart made it impossible for her to remain there a single moment. She did her best to find some palliative for her delightful wound, and yet she did not want to be healed by anything short of God Himself. In the end she realized that all her hopes were useless and that death alone would bring their complete and perfect fulfillment. Hence, she asked for death in order to enjoy Him whose absence aroused that delicious longing in her. And yet she wished never to die, but to suffer always. In her heart, as on a battleground, a violent combat was waged between joy and suffering, or the desire to live and the desire to die: to live in order to suffer or to die in order to be happy. At one and the same time she wished and did not wish either life or death. St. Paul, wounded by the arrow of this longing, and deeply wounded by this strange love, considered life an evil and envied death, for thus he could enjoy that presence in which alone he could find the remedy for his yearning. But since the fruition of God is measured by a blessed eternity and the time given for suffering in this life is less than a fleeting moment, he was willing not to quit this life.

A holy soul desires to suffer in the hope of finding death, and for a brief period such a desire may bring relief to its hunger for God. Soon, however, it perceives that no opportunity is given for it to die in conformity with the will of God. Like David the soul complains piteously: "Unhappy me! When will my unhappy banishment end? When my thoughts, which alone see my delightful desolation, give me no rest and ask: 'Where is your God?' my eyes answer with a flood of tears that flow day and night without ceasing. They speak for me. They say that I can no longer live as I would, beset as I am by the sharp arrows of a fierce love. I am unable to help myself or to ask for help or be aided by

earthly remedies. Anything short of death, however sublime, is the enemy of my happiness and conspires to render my wounds more desperate and incurable."

Tell such a person that another has died, and he is instantly envious. He cannot understand how a Christian, who is a child of God and an heir to glory, can find happiness in this life if he truly believes and hopes in the rich promises of a life to come. He cares not who it is that delivers him from the chains of mortality or who severs the bonds of his bodily captivity, provided only that it be done quickly. It is unimportant who brings his pilgrimage to an end, whether he be an angel from heaven or a devil from hell, God or a creature, a violent or a natural death, provided that, after having asked for the kingdom of heaven, the benevolent will of God concurs. Once when coming out of an ecstasy which lasted three days and three nights, St. Thomas Aquinas informed his companion that the wounds which God had inflicted upon his soul would soon find their remedy. Shortly after, on entering the monastery where he died, he said: "This is the beloved and longed for place of my rest; here will I dwell." The superhuman joys which he had experienced made it impossible for him to tolerate a mortal existence.

The imperfect light of dawn gradually grows brighter and at noon it attains its full beauty. In like manner, the intellect is gradually purified by the communications of divine light and as it draws closer to the source of its supernatural brilliance, it is transformed from light to light, as St. Paul tells us: "We who contemplate the glory of the Lord are transformed into His image, going from light to light, as by the Spirit of God." A mind thus lovingly drawn sometimes feels so great an urge to rise upward that it neglects to take care of the necessities of the body. Its attention is

so strongly riveted upon divine things that it disregards itself and all creatures. A fiery liquid seems to penetrate the heart and diffuse itself into all the faculties of soul and body so that the individual feels that it will melt and dissolve. Or God sometimes sends forth His loving arrows, which the soul cannot long endure and still live. That is why God marvelously moderates these experiences in order to maintain the soul in the body.

The soul then begins to experience that it now lives absorbed in God and that its love of God has caused it to be changed by a subtle transformation. It seems to have reached the point where, as the mystics say, a man's soul is not only above itself, but outside itself. A divine fire penetrates the will with a sweet and peaceful love, but there are no longer any external manifestations in the sensitive powers. Rather, the fire is communicated interiorly to the intellectual powers and these powers lose contact with the bodily functions so that the latter are suspended. Such love is more subtle and more intimate. It also has a greater unifying and transforming power. Its ardor is so intense that it seems to inflame the holy soul and draw it into the eternal flames of holy love where it is consumed.

CHAPTER 36 K

The Operations of Holy Love

ALTHOUGH divine love operates in a supernatural manner, here below it must follow a measure and progress adapted to the present state. God reveals the effects of His love slowly and by degrees, for if He were to hasten this marvelous work and not observe the suitable measure and order for drawing the soul to Himself, the soul would be unable to withstand the divine operations. That is why the soul, during the mysterious process in which love seems to consume the soul with a penetrating fire, is forced to cry out impatiently and ask that its longings be satisfied and that it be changed and transformed at once in the immense abyss of love's pure flames.

On the other hand the soul seems to hear the voice of love inviting and urging it to love and to allow itself to be drawn. It reproaches the soul for its weakness and coldness in comparison with the vivacity of the flames of love. The most violent and terrifying thunderbolt causes less reaction than this spiritual voice which is wondrously heard within the soul. The soul is sure that the voice is as real as the extraordinary effects which that voice produces are efficacious

and powerful, for this is not a sterile word but is filled with fecundity. It is not an empty word, but it effects what it announces, informing the holy soul what love wishes to work in it in a divine manner.

But in thinking how to answer God's voice, the soul is already anticipated by His love, and unites its flames of love with His. After certain preliminaries, these mutual fires eventually unite in a union so close that it seems inseparable. Desirous of possessing this delightful treasure which anticipates the invitation and offers itself willingly, the devout soul would wish to clasp it to its bosom and possess it completely. Meanwhile, God presents a powerful attraction and seems to absorb the love of the creature, so that its flames are absorbed in those of the Beloved. Then, when the soul returns to itself, it hopes to have its sweet revenge by vanquishing Him who has so often caused such ecstasy.

On the part of the Beloved such a love elevates; on the part of the loving soul it is a love that abases. Now the soul is His and He, in turn, belongs to the soul. He reveals Himself to the soul and it melts away in delight before Him. In their holy ardor the two spouses hold each other captive, and this so strongly that for a time one cannot tell which of the two loves will be victorious. In fact, the practical love (by which the mystics mean the love which the soul produces when it is active, operating, and loving and which prompts it always to embrace what is agreeable to God) and the love of fruition (whereby the soul is said to be acted upon, moved, and prompted by the loving action of God) are at this instant equally strong, because the soul would wish to absorb the immensity of God's love but just when it is on the point of being satisfied, it is itself absorbed and transformed.

I can best explain all this by relating an incident in the

life of St. Bernard. One day, while kneeling before a crucifix, he was sensibly moved by the ecstatic love which nailed and held Jesus to the cross. He felt himself raised from earth in order to embrace Jesus, but Jesus detached His bleeding hands from the cross and bent forward, as if to forestall Bernard's loving embrace by His own. Jesus and Bernard draw near to one another and stretch forth their arms to embrace one another. One could not distinguish whether it is Jesus who leans upon Bernard's loving bosom, or Bernard who swoons and languishes upon Jesus' breast. Emboldened by this wonderful favor and realizing that it was Jesus' love which produced this transport of love in him, Bernard was unwilling to loosen his grip, lest he be vanquished. He gathered all his strength in the hope of returning that same strong embrace which he had received from the Beloved. The struggle only served to augment the flames of love and their ardor was strengthened by the divine rivalry. It seems as if the Crucified yields to the importunities of one who desires to be crucified with Him and at the same time the soul is impelled to obey the transporting power of the Crucified. Their mutual longing is but a feint or a pause for the purpose of studying how best to succeed in the rivalry of love. Does Jesus belong to Bernard, or Bernard to Jesus? Either way, it is true. Yet, because of the ebb and flow of this sacred love, Bernard soon ceases to be absolutely absorbed in Jesus and Jesus is no longer so intimately united to Bernard.

We see all this in the encounter of practical love and the love of fruition, of active love and passive love, of effective charity and receptive charity, of the love which we exercise and of the love wherein we receive rather than give. Each one ravishes the other and seeks to absorb its rival. In this holy war the furious assaults and mutual efforts stir up such

divine fires that the Creator's love seems to be transformed into that of His creature and that of the creature seems to be devoured by that of the Creator. But the alternating struggle causes each love to increase, for the vigor of love is strengthened by the violence of its exertions, with the result that the triumph of the one is a stimulus to the other, who confesses that he has been conquered in order that he may again conquer.

God's love often appears to be the weaker because it sometimes gives way to deliberate and calculated flight, as Jesus did with the disciples at Emmaus, when He made a move to continue on His journey. God does this in order to increase the fervor of the faithful soul. He draws near to it to arouse its love and then flees from it to give it an opportunity to fan the fires of its desire. That is why He gives Himself unexpectedly. Yet, when the soul opens its arms for His embrace and feels the warmth of His divine fire, and when, amid delightful transports of love, the soul thinks to possess its happiness, He escapes from its embrace and flees away.

Sometimes, however, the two loves are so perfectly matched that they remain as it were suspended and enraptured at their mutual perfection. One might say that they had temporarily sworn a truce. But their nature is opposed to idleness, for love is an unquiet thing and so they begin again with mystic fervor as if ashamed of their holy sloth and as if to blot out that reproach by a struggle which must terminate in the death of one or the other.

This supreme activity of holy love could not long endure without causing the separation of the soul from the body. Practical love, by which the Holy Spirit moves and stimulates the human will toward intimate union with God, must eventually yield to the love of fruition, which gradually

dissolves it and causes it to expire happily in the flames of its loving opponent, where it is absorbed, buried, transformed.

Driven by a desire that cannot be sated, the faithful soul strives to encompass and absorb the totality of divine love. But the more it tries to do so, the more it is absorbed and devoured by that love which completely penetrates the soul and all its affections. The result is an extraordinary transformation in which the soul attains the highest union which can be had with God in this life through the sublime working of grace.

Who can describe the raptures of this melting away, this death or absorption in love? What heart or tongue could express the sweetness of that glorious death of which St. Paul spoke when he said: "You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ, in God"? O loss greatly to be desired, which finds life in its own death. What a death and what a life! O love without love, which is never so much love as when it is without love! The holy soul lives in love; rather, love lives in the soul. The love which impelled the soul to energetic activity and which carried it with great force toward the love of Jesus, is no more. That ancient phoenix has died, and the love of fruition and repose and delight embraces the living God. God now abides in the soul without rival or competitor. This love is the new phoenix. It is not the love of movement, action, and deeds, for it there is no longer movement, but only repose; no more outbursts, no more activity, but a deep and delightful silence.

We have spoken of the love that liquefies, a love experienced by the spouse when she declared that her heart melted at the sound of the voice of her Beloved. We do not discuss here that charity by which the holy soul adapts itself to all the lovable inclinations and desires of the divine will and

accepts whatever His good pleasure decrees, like a liquid whose shape is determined by that of the vessel which contains it or like molten metal which holds the shape of the mould into which it has been poured. It is not of that love, however excellent and divine it may be, that we here treat, but of another, an incomparably superior love. In the first kind of love activity still predominates and the soul knows little or nothing of fruition. This love, on the contrary, is in the end victorious and causes the other to melt, to be dissolved, and to be transformed in its masterful flames.

CHAPTER 37 K

The Sacrament of Love

THE Eucharist is the most marvelous of all God's works. the most prodigious of all His miracles, the most magnificent of all His benefactions, the most condescending of all His favors, and the sweetest of all the sacraments. The graces obtained in the other sacraments are contained in this Sacrament in an eminently loftier and more divine manner. It is the end to which are ordered and related, like lines to their center and the rays to the sun, all the other sacraments and all other exercises and means which the providence of God has disposed to raise the soul to the highest perfection attainable in this life. Since it is the Sacrament of sacraments and the consummation of all the others, for they derive their perfection and efficacy from it, we may say, due proportion being observed, that all the favors, graces, and helps for our salvation are admirably and efficaciously contained in the Eucharist. And if it is true that all divine activity within souls is aimed at uniting the soul with Him who is infinitely lovable and good, we can only obtain that admirable union in the highest degree of perfection possible during this life by the reception of the precious body and blood of Jesus.

All other unions need to find their fulfillment in this divine and sovereign union. When a man is begotten, the

vegetative and sensitive powers which are communicated to him are ennobled by the rational soul which constitutes the man as such. Of themselves these powers would cause him to live merely as a plant or an animal. If, then, there is a goal or end of human life which we love for itself alone and in which we love all things else, we may say that the Eucharist is the end, the perfection, and the consummation of all the means, helps, and exercises of our salvation, since they are desirable only so far as they are related to perfect union with God. This being true, we must conclude that in this divine and most august Sacrament we have not only a tributary of holiness but the source of holiness itself and that love abides here without measure.

Jesus is wholly and perfectly desirable in the Eucharist, because here we discover and make our own whatever can satisfy our desires. That is why all the stages of love and all the different ways God uses in communicating the fire of His holy love are to be found in this Sacrament. And they are the more efficaciously given as one more closely approaches Him who said that He had come to cast fire upon the earth. His life was prefigured for us by that mysterious flaming chariot which Ezechiel described. In the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus puts the finishing touch to the chariot of His triumphant love and He vigorously stirs up those divine flames of which elsewhere He dispenses only the sparks. In the Eucharist He communicates the very fire of His love to faithful souls.

In uniting Himself to souls in the Eucharist, Jesus does not seek to make them love Him, but to make them more loving; not to infuse charity in them, but to increase and perfect their charity. This increase in love is no idle perfection, but it gives impetus to the highest operations of

¹ Ezech. 15.

which the soul is capable. Let us say that He has made this august Sacrament to be the chief proving-ground of love. Jesus loves because He wishes to be loved. He communicates His love in order to cause in the soul the merit of the love which will be its reward, for love is its own motive. cause, merit, and reward. Jesus gives Himself in the Eucharist, but He wishes to be desired. He invites, but He wants to be sought after. He moves men, but He wants them to take the trouble to find Him, and once they have found Him, lovingly to embrace Him. On His part He opens His bosom and His lips to those who would lose themselves in the one or cling sweetly to the other. "He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood, abides in Me and I in him." 2 He referred to a dwelling built by love, for every Communion aims at a spiritual contact and an indwelling. Many persons pressed about Jesus in the crowd, but He was oblivious of all except the woman who reached out to touch the hem of His garment. "He that abides in charity, abides in God and God in him." 8 It is by holy love that God makes His way into our souls and there takes up His residence. By a reciprocal love we take possession of Him and dwell in His bosom, in imitation of the mutual indwelling of the divine Persons, whereby each Person is a throne for the others.

The joining of these two loves effects that happy union of which Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. Jesus comes forth and the soul also advances, but before they meet, how much turning back and how much desire and longing! The holy soul makes a move forward and then draws back; it dares, yet it fears; it lifts itself up, and then abases itself; it is exalted and at the same time trembles with horror. The impression made on it by the greatness of Jesus' love gives it

² John 6:56.

^{* 1} John 6:16.

new confidence, and it lets itself go, but with reverent fear, for it sees that it is more drawn than it is summoned. The Holy Spirit, meanwhile, wholly in possession of its will, enkindles in it those fires of divine charity without which the holy soul could not presume to advance. Jesus approaches in all the flaming splendor of His love in order to pour Himself out in the soul that is well-disposed. Now a holy struggle ensues and the human heart is the battle-field. On which side is the stronger desire? Is it on the part of Him who gives or of him who receives? Which is the stronger love? Is it that of Jesus or that of the soul? Whose will shall prevail and impose itself on the other? Will it be the one whose created love disposes for union or the one who wishes, by His uncreated love, to perfect and bring about that union?

Happy the soul which has purified itself from the slightest impurity that would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing it for the marvelous union to which it is gratuitously invited. What fervor and ardor, what fire and flame the Holy Spirit will produce when there is the necessary detachment, separation, purity, and holiness. If He could weep, the Holy Spirit would weep bitterly when through our fault we cannot welcome the Host in our hearts with all the love that man is capable of when conjoined to so powerful a principle. But if He finds a soul sufficiently perfect to receive His operations, the Holy Spirit will unite His fire with the flames of love whereby Jesus intends to gain the mastery over His creature.

What will happen to the heart between these two furnaces of love? Bodies draw near to one another and lips press lips when the God-Man is received in Holy Communion. Then two spirits are joined together in fervent embrace and two loves penetrate and lose themselves in each other. But the soul's love is too feeble and too un-

fitted for the task of bringing about the desired change and transformation. Therefore, after many protestations and acts of fervor, the heart is finally constrained to yield to a new increase of the love which results from the exercise of these two loves and the enjoyment of the good which is contained in this Sacrament. Then it is that the soul lives Christ's own life, the life which He received from His Father.⁴

The soul feels itself so warmed and aglow with the fire of divine love and is so deeply wounded by its arrows, so powerfully touched by its charm, so perfectly enraptured by its touches, so inebriated by its sweetness, and so strongly held in its embrace, that it sighs and yearns incessantly. The soul is no longer itself. It can live only for and in the love of Him who, being Love itself, has become all things lovable for the soul. It has no desire for love that is a mere resemblance or imitation. It cannot comprehend how anyone could be satisfied with himself. In some mysterious fashion it understands, without understanding, that contentment consists in being stripped of all contentment and in being plunged into the immense sea of the love of Jesus, to be consumed in the furnace of His love. All these things take place in the interior of the soul and are accompanied by a joy as great as it is profound. The soul seems already to have attained the end of its desires in the source of pure love.

⁴ John 6:57.

CHAPTER 38 K

Transformation Through Love

WHEN we speak of the godlike change or transformation which perfect love can bring about in this life, we do not mean that there is established between the soul and God a union of identity, of which our Redeemer spoke when He said: "I and the Father are one" and: "You, Father, in Me, and I in You." It would be an evident contradiction to say that the creature can become God by nature. The transformation and union of which we speak presupposes that love which, by reason of its sweetness and the vehemence of its wondrous delight, seems to melt the affective portion of the soul and to absorb all its strength and the light of its intellect. Without effort of its own, the soul becomes dead to self and all things and is reduced to a state of passivity by a flaming and subtle love which penetrates the soul. The transformation is one which affects the will so that as regards its affections the soul is not in itself but in God. The soul no longer lives or acts of itself, but as if animated by God's own life. It is not that the soul does not act. but the divine touch in a wondrous manner takes from it all consciousness of its own activity. The principle of its knowledge is not so much its own understanding as it is God in its understanding; the principle of its love is not so much its own will as it is God in its will. An experimental love causes in it something similar to that which beatific love and the light of glory cause in the blessed.

In uniting Himself gloriously to the blessed, the uncreated Word transforms them from the light of faith to the light of clear vision, from obscure knowledge into the full day of eternal life. Similarly, when in this life He unites Himself to contemplative souls through His ecstatic love, He causes them to savor with delight, by the contentment with which the Holy Spirit floods their soul, some faint imitation of that which perfectly satisfies the blessed in heaven. And as the omnipotent Word deifies the intellects to which He is permanently united in eternal glory, so the ecstatic love of fruition has the power to transform into God, by an affective change, all those who place no obstacle in the way of His activity. And as one may say of the blessed that they have become gods by imitation, so contemplative souls seem to be swallowed up in the immensity of a divine love in which they find no trace of creatures or of themselves, no memory of what they are or have been or have done. They know only that they do not know. They know only God. They do not feel, enjoy, see, touch, or experience anything but His delightful love; nothing, if I may so speak, but the adorable Divinity into whom this fervent love has caused them to enter so that they might be divinely transfigured and transformed.

In this happy moment the spouse is led to the sacred couch of her divine Beloved. We may here consider the three stages of contemplative love as three distinct couches. The first belongs to the spouse alone, the second is common to the spouse and the Beloved, but the third is reserved for

the Beloved alone. On the first couch the loving spouse attains to that degree of contemplation wherein, after mortifying her passions and collecting her interior and exterior faculties, she rests sweetly, untroubled by creatures. Once she has made considerable progress in the exercise of pure love of God, she moves on to the second couch, where her self-love dies and she begins to take pleasure in the enjoyment of her Beloved. But when she reaches the third couch, which is His alone, she forgets self and is despoiled of all affection for herself, to be transformed in the living flame of His love and to lose herself in His loving bosom. To use the language of St. Paul, whosoever cleaves to God becomes but one mind with Him.¹

On the first couch the holy spouse is certain that nothing can alter her repose or trouble her peace, and all creatures are warned to "wake her not." On the second couch the presence of the divine Lover causes rapturous delights in her chaste and modest breast. There she enjoys His embrace, tastes His sweet lips, and hears silent whispers which cause her to swoon with pleasure. Her Beloved speaks to her heart and she protests that she is entirely His and that He is her all. Finally, on the third couch, in His pure yet strong embrace, she is absorbed and transformed, as it were, in the abyss of uncreated love. On the first couch the spouse is separated from creatures and rests in herself; on the second. the Beloved is hers; but on the last, she becomes, by deifying love, everything that He is. On the first couch she seeks the Beloved of her soul; on the second, she embraces Him; on the third, she becomes one with Him. She rejoices first in her own tranquillity, then she shares with the Beloved all His goods, and finally, by participation, she is identified with His adorable and lovable Person.

¹ Rom. 8:9.

All this happens in an orderly way, according to a plan that is as delightful as it is incomprehensible. It happens when it pleases the sweet and loving God to arouse the devout soul, by His secret touches and frequent visits, to aspire for the desired union in which its perfection consists. Ardently embraced and drawn by delights, the soul tries to correspond to the divine attractions and touches and to correspond faithfully with the insatiable avidity which a vehement love causes in its will. Hence the great eagerness which bears it swiftly toward the object of its love. During this strenuous activity the soul seems to become rarified and to expand in order to draw to itself the Good that it loves above all else. And yet it seems that, being so much stronger than she, He succeeds in dissolving and liquefying her by His hidden and admirable power, the better to dispose the soul for the mystical effects to follow. Then follows the union which consummates the mystical marriage of the soul with the uncreated Spirit.

However, divine love is infinitely more powerful and penetrating than any other, and therefore it cannot be satisfied by this mystical embrace or mutual adherence of two loving spirits unless it pervades every part of the soul. That is why there is a kind of absorption of one love by the other. This is the preparation for the love of fruition or enjoyment, in which the holy soul, filled with desire, first becomes ardent, then is filled with longing, and finally is melted and dissolved, so to speak, in order to be filled with that unique good which perfectly satisfies its capacity for love. Then its faculties, ennobled by touches incomparably more divine than ever before, are recollected and reflective, so that the intellect and the will recognize and grasp the most high and adorable Divinity without delay, resistance, interruption, or distraction. Nothing now dis-

turbs the peaceful and tranquil possession which consti-

tutes its happiness on earth.

All this takes place internally and by a kind of infusion. The mind does not understand that it understands and does not avert to the fact that it makes no effort or act of knowing. It is so overwhelmed by the floods of divine light which present God's immensity and grandeur to it that it feels like a drop of water swallowed up in an infinite sea. I cannot explain this, but its understanding seems to be a reception rather than an activity, something passive and nonresistant rather than something active and productive. Seeing itself to be raised to such unexpected heights by the divine activity, the soul feels that it is no longer itself, that it possesses another intellect or faculty of understanding and knowing, or that God has given it as great a participation in His incomprehensible knowledge as present conditions will permit.

Much of this applies to the will also. It is filled with an overwhelming love which corresponds to the supreme activity of the intellect. It feels itself to be wholly changed into a loving inclination toward God, for now its whole life consists in breathing continually of His fire and flames. However, it is not now so much a matter of the will's own operation but of allowing itself to be saturated, penetrated, and enraptured by love. The will is, as it were, insensible to its own proper activity, due to the intensity of its new occupation. It is a state which is so far above anything it could experience by its own operations that it experiences a joy which far surpasses any delight that it could produce of itself. The soul feels that it is on the threshold of heaven and that it is separated from the company of the blessed only by this mortal life.

Thus the holy soul enters into a region of profound

peace. It feels that all its faculties are plunged into an unfathomable ocean of peaceful and silent rest. It would not abandon its consolation and sweetness for anything in this world. Its whole life is peace. It has been brought into the joy of the Holy Spirit and given a taste of impassibility. Even if it wished to do so, it could not now be troubled or afflict itself or in any way become distracted. If one should subject its flesh and bones, or even its soul and faculties to the rack, it would derive from this experience nothing but that peace which St. Paul says surpasses all understanding.

Everything about such a person—his eyes, mouth, face, words, gestures, and bearing—gives a vivid picture of the incomprehensible peace that pervades his soul. And the more the soul progresses, the more deeply is it plunged into this peaceful ocean of love, where satisfaction is linked with pleasant repose in profound and perfect silence. So agreeably does love occupy its faculties that they are content to feel, without reflection, their marvelous participation in the tranquillity which is proper to the three divine Persons of the Trinity.

At times the soul feels that this ravishing peace is diffused throughout the soul like a delightful balm, a perfume from paradise, or a sweet and precious oil of great penetrating power. At other times it seems that the soul has been introduced into the wine-cellars of the Beloved and that it savors the delight that accompanies the enjoyment of God's presence. This marvelous peace, this serenity and joy in the Holy Spirit, and this confidence in God sometimes increase to such a degree that the soul is no longer like an infant clinging tightly to the little doll wherein it finds its pleasure, but is completely engulfed and swallowed up in the plenitude of the divine so that it no longer has any thought or sentiment for itself. It is like a child satiated

with milk and nodding in sweet slumber, its mouth still clinging to the breast of its mother. There is, however, this difference: the holy soul is fully aware of the divine infusion, and this awareness is due to certain unmistakable and genuinely divine touches. By some mysterious light the soul understands that something is being done to it more intimately and profoundly than can be understood or imagined. It feels like a burning coal in a fiery furnace, and it knows that it belongs there. While this divine operation lasts, the soul is as incapable of leaving it as are the damned of leaving the fires which a just God has prepared for them.

CHAPTER 39 K

Holy Love Surpasses Knowledge

IN JUDGING the words of great men we should always take into account the circumstances in which they spoke, for these sometimes lend importance to what they say. When St. Paul wished to talk about the heights to which charity can raise a man in this life, he was not content to do so in a few words nor did he attempt to say all that could be said of so ineffable a grace in lengthy discourses. How, indeed, could anyone say everything about it, when even the most profound knowledge and science cannot attain to it? St. Paul, whose eloquence had something godlike about it, was extremely careful to choose the right words and to use concepts which would penetrate the hearts of those who heard them, thus winning them over to the wonderful truths contained in his words.

St. Paul began by asking God for a very special grace. He exacted of those who were to receive this ineffable grace dispositions unlike any he had ever before stipulated. "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto

the inward man. That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth: to know the charity of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge." ¹

Knowing that God gives His grace only to those who in their humility are as nothing before Him and that He hears the prayers of those who ask of His goodness only if they prostrate themselves before Him, St. Paul fell to his knees. His self-abasement was profound because he was going to raise his thoughts heavenward. In order to speak of the highest favor of which the human spirit is capable in this life, thanks to the divine mercy and goodness, he ascended to the original source of all spiritual light which shines throughout the angelic hierarchies and within the Trinity itself. What he sought for the interior man was a strength which flows from the Holy Spirit, a sharing of the rich light of glory with which that Spirit ennobles, elevates, and strengthens the souls of the blessed so that they can endure the incomprehensible splendor of the divine essence. He prays for an efficacious, living faith that would bring Jesus Christ into their hearts to take up His abode there. Unsatisfied still, he asked that his readers be not only supported by Him who is the very strength and virtue of the Almighty, but that they be founded on charity, that is, confirmed in their love of God, in order to comprehend the properties, activity, and effects which exceed all understanding and surpass all knowledge.

The Apostle did not mean to say that charity is without understanding, for that cannot be, but he did have in mind a charity that surpasses all understanding. Moreover, charity does not hinder the gaze of the soul because a great

¹ Eph. 3:14.

interior light is communicated to the soul and it is so splendid and limitless that it provides a proportion between the object and the created intellect. Then this knowledge is followed by so prompt and efficacious a love that the intellect has neither the time nor the ability to discern or examine the reasons, motives, and causes of what it is experiencing.

It seems to me that the following is the explanation of how a soul can love without knowledge. As one becomes accustomed over a long period, through acquired or infused, natural or supernatural species, to the contemplation of God's infinite perfections, some impressions of their great excellence remain in the soul and, with the help of grace, one acquires a great facility in arousing in the will the acts of love which correspond to his appreciation of God. At the mere remembrance or thought of Him, the soul seems to feel a divine fire rushing forth from the innermost depths of its soul, and this fire seems to transform the very nature of love. So greatly does this fire increase at times that it cancels out the attention of the other faculties of the soul. the intellect included. Submerged as it is in an abyss of love, the soul plunges into that obscure and dark ignorance in which the living God dwells. The soul is not so much inebriated as it is confused and unable to explain anything at all. It cannot see or understand or contemplate or will or desire anything, because the power to perform these acts remains bound and restricted. This phenomenon seems to occur in the very essence of the soul, beyond the soul's faculties.

The soul does not know God, but it tastes Him; it does not contemplate God, but savors Him. It embraces Him and presses Him to itself, not in His majesty, grandeur, omnipotence, infinity and immensity, which surpass its understanding, but by way of the union of a loving, actual possession, which is so delightful that it dispels every other thought and suspends every other attention so that the will may be transformed into the love which ravishes it so intimately.

Actually, the will does not embrace or possess God, but it is possessed, embraced, and penetrated by that incomparable love which triumphs over all its faculties and their operations. It loves without knowing that it loves and without being able to say how it loves. Its very breath, its life, and even the beating of its heart seem less natural to it than this love by which it is wounded with such delight. And although the object of its love makes itself felt, it is not known as an object is known by the understanding, nor as the term and perfection of knowledge; rather, it is a principle which touches, penetrates, absorbs, and engulfs the will in the flames of divine charity. The Holy Spirit, the term of uncreated love and the adorable source of created love, seems to infuse Himself as much as He can into the center of the soul, with a love so perfect and efficacious that the soul must bow before this inexpressible activity and thus be entirely converted. God does not fail to supply whatever would be necessary for so generous an act of love. One should not, therefore, be surprised if, during its progress as well as at the beginning, there seems to be no motive or reason to cause this love to be born and increased. It's origin, increase, and perfection have as their only cause the touch of the hand of God. Its beginning, progress, and full perfection are absolutely dependent upon the omnipotent efficacy of God's prevenient love.

Moreover, the soul has no doubt that it is God who acts. In fact, the whole man is prostrate before this mystical Ark, speechless, powerless, and with the natural functions sus-

pended. Yet the understanding is not completely lost amid the marvels from which it is banished. The eyes of the intellect are closed and the doors of knowledge are shut, and yet the soul is aware of a favor so agreeable and so sweet and one which gives it so much strength that, could it but once enjoy it perfectly, the soul would desire nothing more. The soul learns from experience the proof of what Christ said about the Spirit: that we know neither the term of His departure nor that of His progress. As long as His operation continues in the will, it deprives the will of its customary power to command the other faculties. The intellect also must avow that it has no ideas or species proportionate to the great love which absorbs and seems to annihilate the strength of the intellect, together with its power of conceiving and understanding and its power of contemplation. As a result, the intellect is plunged into the darkness of divine delights, in the midst of which it sings with the Psalmist: "Night shall be my light in my pleasures" and with Jacob: "Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I know it not." Like St. Thomas the Apostle, the soul knows better from touch than from sight: "You are my Lord and my God."

The Samaritan woman brought the first news of Jesus to those of her village. Her hearers believed what she had to say, but later declared that they had learned little from her, compared to the impact Jesus had made upon them by His presence.²

There are two kinds of knowledge in the unitive life, the first preceding and the second one following the movement of the will. The first leads to the search for the Beloved; the second occurs once He has been found, grows by union with Him, and attains its perfection in the enjoyment that is proper to the present life. The first knowledge is like that

² John 4:42.

which the Samaritan woman gave to the inhabitants of her village; the second is like that which the inhabitants acquired once having heard and spoken to Christ. Initial knowledge proposes the good of sovereign love; the other learns by experience that God is incomparably more lovable than when first proposed. As a result of this second love the intellect becomes firmly convinced and attains to a clear knowledge and intimate grasp of the excellence of its object. The taste or savor follows imperfect knowledge and is in turn the cause of a still more perfect knowledge, so that knowledge is not so much the mother of love as it is its daughter. It opens the door to delight, but is also the term of delight.

Endowed with supernatural light, the intellect grasps only obscurely the motives for love which are included in the immensity of the sovereign good. Once the will is plunged into the delightful embrace of the Beloved and rejoices at the sweet savor with which He floods its heart, it begins to acquire a better appreciation of the beauties it adores. Grandeurs which the intellect formerly proposed to it, have less weight than the grandeurs which now touch and delight it. "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet." ³ The fire in the will increases the light of the intellect and love helps knowledge become wisdom. The holy operation of the Holy Ghost in the soul through charity disposes the mind to penetrate the depths of those truths of which it knows only the husk and the externals.

A love like this surpasses all science and all knowledge. The intellect stands at the door and only the will enters the inner-chamber which contains the immaculate bed of the Beloved. Love gives way to the vehemence of its rapture and knows no rest until it has plunged into the immensity of

³ Ps. 33:9.

the love which is proper to God alone, whither the intellect has led it. But here love seems to falter. It is, as it were, swallowed up in a sweet flood. Love understands by this that it is more blessed in the loss of itself than if it opened its eyes. It acknowledges that the intellect and its views are incompatible with the ravishment in which the will now delights. It learns what St. John meant when he said that a man does not know God unless he loves Him.

There is, of course, a difference between the life of the wayfarers and that of the blessed. In glory one will love as much as he knows and knowledge will be the door which leads to love. In this world, on the contrary, one advances in the knowledge of God in proportion as he loves Him. St. John gives as the reason the fact that God is love by His very nature. Man's happiness in this life does not consist in the perfection of his intellect but in that of his will. Here below we see God as in a mirror, as St. Paul says; in heaven we shall see Him as He is in Himself. Here below the will is perfected by being united to God through the activity of substantial divine Love who, together with the charity in which He is given, leads the other divine Persons into the faithful soul to effect a real and true union between the Creator and His creature. The sight of God who in glory is the principle of life would, on this earth, cause death. But even here on earth love causes a fountain of life in us which springs forth unto eternity. We shall not love God more in eternity than we do in time. All things pass away: knowledge, prophecy, the charismatic graces, and even faith and hope. But charity will remain. Here below we love God without seeing Him; in heaven we shall not see Him without loving Him.

A soul on earth would like to remain blind, for sight will remind it that it is not yet perfectly united to its principle.

It does not sec, but savors; it understands that God can be tasted but cannot be expressed in words. The great marvels which He works in the soul show Him to be incomprehensible and inexplicable. The intellectual darkness causes the soul to enjoy delights which it could not savor as long as it followed the light of its intelligence. It is enough for it to be overcome by love's violence and to be filled with a divine affection which transforms it into the condition of Him after whom it has yearned throughout life.

CHAPTER 40 K

Spiritual Crosses

AS THERE are various divine communications proportioned to the various states to which the soul is elevated by grace and as the joys which flow from these communications give rise to holy delight, so also there are diverse states in which God's providence dispenses interior crosses which result in spiritual desolation. Some desolations are more severe than others, although God never permits anyone to be tried beyond his strength. Desolation may at times be so intense as to drive the soul to final despair, were it not that God dispenses crosses wisely and uses them as means proper to the end He has in mind for the perfection of souls. He embraces them with His right arm while He wounds them with His left; He strengthens them in secret, while openly and sensibly afflicting them.

A soul may be so habituated to the practices of prayer that it feels no distaste for them as time goes on nor is it fatigued by a concentrated meditation on the motives of salvation or by contemplation on the perfections of the Creator. Such a soul has yet to learn from experience how true it is that "the Spirit breathes where He will, and you know not whence He comes and whither He goes." For such a soul the moments of the day were numbered only by the soul's ardent outbursts of fervor, and the minutes of the

night only by its sighs. It had to do violence to the ardor of its devotion when duties called to its generous and faithful attention. The continuity of its prayer made no distinction between day and night.

Now, however, the soul begins to be like a person suffering from asthma, whose slightest movement makes breathing difficult. The ordinary hours of prayer now seem like centuries to the soul; a quarter of an hour, like years. If it wishes to practice vocal prayer, it can hardly open its mouth or move its lips or its tongue. Its speech is languid, slow, hesitant. If it must chant the psalms in choir or read to the community, its voice is hoarse and deep, and all attempts to strengthen it are useless. The soul, which heretofore acted promptly, is now sluggish; formerly it was diligent, but now it is lazy; once it was tireless, now it is without strength; once it was generous, now it is niggardly; and where formerly it was insatiable, it is now nauseated by the things of God. It has not even the courage to desire what is good or to make a magnanimous decision.

All the hopes born of the burning love of God and the zeal for His glory now seem to miscarry. The soul seeks to recapture the divine influences or to inhale holy love from the bosom of Him who is its source, but finds that it is held back by a sensible weight and a heaviness which affects its breathing, as if some heavy mass rested upon its breast. It is something like that which happens to those who are drowning, with this difference, however, that what drowning people feel for but a short time, these souls endure for as long as it shall please God to try them. This becomes almost unbearable, for if ease and promptitude of converse with God are a sign of the soul's well-being, this difficulty seems to be a sign of its sickness or possibly its death.

Holy love, however, still resides in the heart as upon a

glorious throne. It has not lost the perfection of its divine flames, but it is annoyed to see its liberty so hampered. It is not accustomed to such resistance to its movement, nor to endure anything that dampens its blazing fires, nor to bear the weight which holds it back in its generous activity. It hates to see what seems to be a dark abyss between God and itself, preventing it from flying to Him who is its principle. Charity finds itself an unwilling captive, unable to go forth or to manifest its ardor by its actions. Its flames are seemingly restricted and its heat tempered, like the flames of the fiery furnace into which Daniel and his companions had been cast. Although by nature charity is never idle, but active, here it must suffer a paradox. "Give me children," Rachel said to Jacob, "or I shall die." In like manner holy love falls into a mortal sickness unless it is continually busied with holy actions.

This oppression makes itself felt not only during moments of prayer and interior devotion, but is experienced at all times and in all places, even in the exercises of the active life, in the practice of virtue, in periods of recreation and relaxation, during lectures or sermons, and even while eating and drinking. Flights of the soul cease, as do ejaculatory prayers, loving aspirations and ardent sighs, insatiable desires, and all the other ardent acts which are caused by the operations of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost decides to suspend the delightful awareness of His presence, a sadness arises in the lower appetites or passions and causes the distressing oppression of which we speak. It hinders internal operation and also has an effect upon the body, making it difficult if not impossible for it to breathe. This disorder is felt as soon as one awakens from sleep, and it often disturbs one's sleep and rest as well. If the soul wants to describe what it is that wounds it, it cannot, except to say that the soul is unbearable to itself. It cannot act in conformity with the knowledge which it sometimes retains in this state and its torment increases because, knowing its obligations and seeing that God is as good and lovable as He ever was, the soul is unable to discharge its obligations toward Him or to do all that it desires to do for Him.

The disorder sometimes increases until the body aches all over and is exhausted. It is drained of energy and strength. Whether seated, standing, or on its knees, it cannot rest. It would break down or collapse completely were it not that a soul accustomed to these divine trials recovers its equanimity by generous resolutions, saying with Job: "Though He should kill me, I will trust in Him always."

The soul's hope is well founded, for God will not fail to have pity on the soul and to give it some relief in its present necessity. Indeed, one would not refuse that much to a common beast of burden. Nor should the soul neglect to seek the advice of a prudent director or of those experienced in this type of trial, lest he be deceived. In this way also, obedience and prudence will lift up his spirit. The soul should likewise look after the body, but within reason, lest self-love be revived thereby.

Above all, the soul must be careful during this state of abandonment to avoid any violent effort, which oftener than not would further exhaust the brain and bring on headaches and ulcers. As the Apostle says: "It is not of him that wills, but of God who shows mercy." One who has the will to do so does not always advance; usually one is unconsciously raised by the breath of the divine Spirit to the highest acts of contemplation. It suffices that one does not place any voluntary obstacle in the way of divine grace. One must simply wait, with much resignation, patience, and humility,

lest one fall into that incurable state so favorable to the growth of self-love, which has unfortunately all too often destroyed in a few days or even in a single hour all the merits, perfection, and glory which represent the fruit of many years of mortification, practice of virtue, prayer, and supernatural favors.

CHAPTER 41 K

Aridity of Spirit

YET another type of cross is that which causes spiritual aridity and dryness within the soul. When divine consolations are taken away, the soul becomes like a plant which withers and fades in the time of drought and intense heat. Its petals droop, its leaves turn yellow, and its fruit dries up. But when they are enjoying spiritual delights, holy souls are like trees along the banks of rivers; their leaves are fresh and green and they bring forth fruit in due season. This is the way in which David spoke of the just man who busies himself day and night in loving meditation on the eternal will of God.¹

While the delicious current of divine sweetness floods the soul, it is admirably elevated in this prosperous condition and steadily advances heavenward. There is no virtue for which it will not strive. The soul is a miracle of beauty in grace. Its modesty is delightful to behold, its humility is profound, its patience is constant, its love indefatigable, its devotion insatiable, and its fervor knows no limits. The soul is led into the chaste cellars of the Beloved, where it draws at will from the waters which spring up into eternal life. It seems that with all His goodness, beauty, glory, and

¹ Ps. 1:2.

infinite perfections, God bestirs Himself to fill the soul and all its faculties with His precious gifts.

These divine favors, however, are of no greater duration than the holy will of God decrees. He dispenses them wisely and well, but there is no reason for surprise if their course is sometimes interrupted. And as they are distributed to souls as powerful means to help them advance in perfection, as things to be used and not abused, it is not unworthy of divine providence if, holding in His hands as He does an infinite number of ways to reach from one end to the other efficaciously and smoothly, God should suddenly teach the soul a yet more excellent way. But the privation and suspension constitute a spiritual cross which is more distressing than anything else that one can experience in this world.

When the Ark was carried down to the Jordan, the waters which flowed from above halted to allow the visible and mysterious throne of the living God to pass over. So it is with consolations. At their flood they inundate the faculties of the soul and spill over into the sensitive faculties. But sometimes consolations are cut off and the soul must then exchange the joys of its consolations for sad laments. Its joy turns to sadness, its ecstasy to abasement.

At this point the soul is forcibly torn, weeping and with regret, from the sweet breast of its Beloved. This is done in order to wean the soul from it for good. If it is again offered later, it has the taste of gall and worm-wood which is proper to the sorrows in which God now wishes the soul to share, heedless of its cries and tears. God had compassion on Ismael when, dying of thirst, He caused a miraculous fountain to spring up to restore him to his pristine vigor. But He ignores the unbearable thirst of the soul and will even intensify it by holding back the waters which spring up unto eternal life. However, He does this in a

way that is worthy of Himself. Banished from the holy cellar, the soul lies at the door, exposed to all sorts of insults and scorn. "Call me no longer the beautiful one and the delight of the Well-Beloved, but rather, a pitiful sea of bitterness!"

Not only is the soul expelled from the nuptial banquet, but the jealous Spouse harshly requires that it suffer torments as keen as its former delights were sweet; that its present thirst correspond to its previous inebriation of love; that its poverty be determined by its past abundance; and that it suffer an aridity proportioned to the consolations which were once lavished upon it. Complaints and laments go unheeded and the soul's importunities do not cause God to relent. Though it knock on the door with a perseverance that sometimes spells success for the wicked, it hears the reply: "I know you not."

Thus the soul is left with doubts of its own perfection. It has learned from spiritual books to look with suspicion on a will that is too eager to enjoy the consolations of heaven, and yet, however violent and inexplicable that desire is, it is not troublesome or disturbing. The desires of unmortified souls aim at tasting the gifts of God and are motivated by self-love; this desire has its roots in the love of true charity with which God is pleased to dilate the heart without filling it. He opens the mouth of the soul, but does not fill it. He enkindles a burning fervor in it, but will not appease it. He increases the fire of its love, but gives the soul no fuel for the flames.

Souls thus treated no longer experience the infusion of supernatural light in the sublime exercise of contemplation, and those helps to the exercise of mental prayer, such as method, rules, procedure, and points (prescribed for beginners in the spiritual life), now fail them or are used only with boredom and without profit. They live in a strange state of interior and often exterior confusion. Sometimes they are convinced that everyone notices their lowly state or the lack of devotion manifested by their words, actions, or movements. The scorn of others does not trouble thom, for they feel they have only too justly deserved it, but they are easily persuaded that they are giving scandal and that they only live to offend God, in whose presence they are ashamed to appear in their present sorry condition. They think it a sorry condition because they can no longer approach His Majesty with the intensity of devotion which once made them His delight and pleasure. They condemn themselves because they are convinced that their laziness, infidelities, or lack of mortification have paved the way for this spiritual drought and aridity.

Their search for the causes of their unhappiness results in confusion. If they think they have discovered a cause and wish to find some means of satisfying divine justice for their imagined fault, their tears do not flow nor can they feel regret. Their breast is dried up with sorrow. There is no contrition in their heart. They cannot arouse the least feeling of displeasure to show that they humbly ask God for pardon and that they are sorry. Their understanding is no help to them because it does not provide reasons for bemoaning their misfortune. The heavenly reservoir is closed to them and the earthly reservoir is also taken from them, lest it provide them with some consolation, as it did David: "My tears have been my food day and night; the thought of my emptiness continually reproaches me, saying: 'Tell us, O abandoned prophet, where is your God?"

CHAPTER 42 K

Timidity and Scrupulosity

DURING the progressive trials sent by God, the soul reaches a point at which its will is abandoned while its intellect is filled with knowledge and light, drawn either from its own powers of reason or from a supernatural source of light. This is one of the most cruel crosses of all and surpasses anything the soul has ever experienced, because none of the beauty which fills the intellect finds any echo in the will, which remains bleakly empty while the intellect is filled to abundance. The will cannot love the sovereign Goodness shown to it, and the adorable perfections which ravish the understanding do not move it. The excellence of the object contemplated fills the will with desire more than satisfaction, with more thirst than relief. A holy soul might well be tempted to think it preferable to remain in ignorance than to have so lofty a knowledge of objects which it can neither hate nor love. It seems to it that, in some cruel way, it is forbidden to embrace what it so ardently loves. It seems to be held by force, unable to move toward that which is more worthy of love than the soul is of loving.

The soul sees itself torn between its quick and ready mind and its heavy, inactive will. It contemplates the Beloved but has not the courage to go to Him. Briefly, its sublime and lofty knowledge is completely useless to it. God's mercy arouses no confidence in the will, the justice of God does not arouse it to fear, and it feels little or no influence of His infinite wisdom. What is most astonishing is that meditation upon these subjects makes its love less fervent, and although what is contemplated proves God's great love for His creature, the heart becomes less fervent and the mind less inclined to gratitude.

Such persons will affirm that their heart has been changed and that instead of a heart of flesh, they have been given a heart of marble or stone, so deaf is it to the voice of the living God who calls to it constantly. They liken themselves to Pharaoh who, although convinced by the miracles of Moses that he should no longer oppose the manifest will of God that the Israelites be allowed to leave Egypt, could not bring himself to consent to their departure. Love remains strong in their soul, but they have completely lost all feeling of tenderness because they do not know the strength of that love. The intellect may carry the torch before it, but the will does not follow. It proposes, but the will does not respond to that which is presented to it as worthy of infinite love. On the contrary, this afflicts the will all the more. Its distress is reflected in all the other powers and faculties over which the will rules like a queen. Finally, when the soul's efforts in this deplorable state have proven useless, it feels like dying because it is unable to love.

From this arises a certain constraint or contradiction of the heart, a humiliation and lack of courage. Those who once sped along at full sail must now toil with oars. Although they but recently sailed the high seas, they must row now in a pond. These mighty eagles which once sped toward the disc of the sun as to their target, now cling to

the earth like timorous quail. Once lion-tamers, they now take alarm at mere shadows, and tiny gnats strike terror in hearts which had once braved hell itself. In their insatiable hunger, they had once found the earth too small and the heavens too narrow to satisfy their desires; now they are content to remain sadly in their own emptiness, not daring to aspire to anything but the lowest rung on the ladder of grace. They are ashamed to call Him their Beloved. The word friend strikes them as being rude, and all other names which bear witness to familiarity and seem to indicate love can neither be imagined nor pronounced by them. Here all friendly exchange ceases and also the colloquies replete with affection and tenderness. No more that liberty of spirit which God gives to the children He has chosen by grace to be heirs of His immense glory. The soul now considers itself a vile and miserable slave, like those unfortunates who deserve His justice rather than the agreeable effects of His mercy.

Everything begins to be a cause of fear for them. Indifferent occasions are looked upon as suspect, the soul often looks upon the good with an evil eye, and one who wishes to be helpful is taken to be an enemy. Most actions seem to be sins, and the soul imagines praiseworthy circumstances to be occasions of mortal sin, whereas everyone else recognizes the shining splendor of the most attractive virtues. The soul manifests no initiative and will not begin anything except after long and difficult discussions which are often prompted by suspicion. They will not accept, without anxious doubts, advice which has been judiciously thought out or if they accept it, they carry it out fearfully, without enthusiasm, and with misgivings prompted by the unbearable torture of their own conscience. False though it may be, the conviction that it has

failed fills the soul with a regret for which it knows no remedy.

Its examinations of conscience are a confusion of thoughts and its efforts in this regard only plunge the soul into greater obscurity and confusion. "They have trembled for fear where there was no fear." If the soul weeps for its sins and disposes itself for true repentance, it experiences none of that sweetness which God infuses into a soul He is pleased to touch with the sorrow of contrition. This soul, however, seems to feel a devouring worm gnawing at its heart and its mind is a prey to a pusillanimity which makes it timorous, nervous, hesitant, and uncertain. Confession has become an occasion of great anxiety, so occupied is the soul with childish minutiae and sometimes absurdities. Because of this inner agony, the knowledge and competence of the ablest confessor is of little avail.

What is more, the evil flees from the remedy which could be provided by the advice of disinterested directors because the soul suspects their trustworthiness and cannot be certain of a right intention in the sacrament of penance since it doubts the value of its own dispositions. It approaches Holy Communion as if appearing before the fearsome tribunal of some tyrant, cruelly bent upon its ruin. It perspires from fear, turns pale, and swoons with sinking heart and inner torments. Even its preparations for Communion are interrupted by the memory of past deeds which it now thinks were sinful.

Those generous projects which, in its zeal, the soul had contemplated for the increase of God's glory or for the salvation of souls are now no more. The soul no longer attends to anything but its present misery. It despairs of being of any good for others when it is so evil for itself. Although its will has no known affection for any sin—which

it hates more than it does hell, and detests under any circumstances—it doubts having received pardon for past faults, which rise in all their horror before its eyes. It sees that they deserve strict punishment and feels that its damnation would be nothing but justice because it had so unworthily offended the omnipotent God.

The pious confidence caused by the soul's contrition, detestation of sin, tears and atonement, plus the abundant graces bestowed by God, is now changed into confused fears, timid mistrust, and horrifying feelings which could lead it to despair. It is ready to suffer even more than this, if by so doing it might carry out His will. Inwardly it is convinced that it has offended God, but it has no assurance that it has been pardoned its offenses. This ignorance constitutes for it an unequalled cross, which so contracts its heart and saps its courage that it feels too weak to take a single step for the service and love of God.

CHAPTER 43 K

Desolation of Spirit

THERE is said to be a bird, called the sun-chaser, which begins to show signs of life the moment the sun appears on the horizon. After fluttering briefly it rises slowly from the earth with the sun and finally gains the upper-air. It rises to the heavens to meet the sun, from which it derives its name. Winging its way across sea and land, it follows the sun until it sets, and then its own forces begin gradually to fail, as they had grown at sunrise. Slowly descending, the bird falls at length to the earth breathless, without strength, motionless.

Something similar happens to holy souls when God rises, so to speak, and diffuses the loving rays of divine light upon them, pouring His graces into their bosom. Suddenly ravished from on high, they lose contact with earthly things and they soar amid the deifying rays as if these were the source of their life, the soul of their sublime activity, and the object of their delight. But if the divine Sun goes into eclipse and the sweet influences of His loving light are withdrawn, they begin to suffer a sadness that brings forth tears both from those who suffer and those who merely observe. God places souls in this condition so that they may learn in the school of trials the ways in which He makes the soul worthy of His love.

Through this experience holy souls acquire some understanding of the sadness that filled Jesus' soul when He said: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." Indeed, death would be more tolerable to them than life amid such distressing interior constraint in which all the powers of the soul are put to the torture and the soul is deprived of its energy and power. The soul experiences all the emotions which follow and accompany the loss of a great good. Life is an enemy of its repose; but since death is far removed, the soul is cast into a profound abyss of sorrow.

Although spiritual crosses are caused not by a lack of grace but by its excess, and not by its removal and privation but by its approach and presence, in certain cases these crosses produce the same effects in souls as the absence of sanctifying grace. The reason for this is that the soul in this state of spiritual desolation experiences the suspension of the use of certain faculties and powers which bears an external resemblance to the death of the soul caused by mortal sin, which destroys holiness and justice.

One of the signs of the state of grace is an interior awareness that one is a child of God and an heir of heaven. From this awareness the soul experiences a peace which surpasses all understanding and a spiritual joy whose principle, progress, and end are rooted in God. The soul is filled with delight when it reflects upon God's love or considers its own love which fervently embraces the supreme Good. Nevertheless, the soul is now made to suffer the privation of all these things, with the result that it does not recognize its love amid the fears and sorrows which impair its rest and destroy its peace. The soul feels that it is spiritually dead because grace, which is the principle of its supernatural life, and charity, which is the cause of its spiritual activity, give no evidence whereby the soul can recognize the super-

natural state to which it has been raised. Instead, the soul is filled with doubts, scruples, mistrust, confusion, darkness, and frightful desolation. The inferior part of the soul is abandoned to its languors, the concupiscible appetite to its weaknesses, the irascible appetite to its dislikes, and frequently reason itself is beclouded by the disorderliness of the imagination.

How sad to see a soul, which but a moment ago basked in the delights of paradise, reduced now to the pitiable state of Lazarus, who longed for the crumbs which fell from the table. More intolerable still, the soul feels itself to be covered with festering sores which are the more dangerous and painful because they affect the spiritual faculties wherein God suspends the qualities which had made them healthy and freed them from the wounds of original or actual sin. The soul feels the effects of sins it has not committed, but feels nothing of the effects of grace. Thus, it sees in itself only the vestiges of sin; its progress in perfection and growth in virtue are temporarily hidden from its eyes.

God manifests Himself to the soul under the aspect of one who crushes its faculties. He does not reveal to it the beauty from which issue the torrents of divine sweetness. Instead of thoughts worthy of one tending to glory, thoughts measured by eternity alone, the soul unwillingly experiences criminal passions and a disorderliness which can be curbed only by force. Nevertheless, through the secret workings of grace it is submissive to the loving and adorable providence which infallibly leads the elect to their salvation.

God thus wishes the soul to imitate more closely the earthly life of Jesus, whom it will resemble perfectly when it enjoys the beatific vision and His all-embracing love. The soul's life of grace is "hidden with Christ in God" in the same way that the adorable Redeemer outwardly re-

sembled a miserable sinner. We see here an important truth: ecstatic love is as powerful as death and as inexorable as hell, not because it separates the soul from God or excludes it from His sovereign friendship, but because of the effects of this apparent disunion and withdrawal of divine love. These effects, however, are not incompatible with actual union and friendship with God; on the contrary, they are means which help to increase both the one and the other, until nothing can separate the soul from Him, as St. Paul says.

God does not destroy the natural perfections of the damned but conserves them for the execution of that which the severity of His justice has ordained. These perfections, however, do not bring them any consolation; God uses them as instruments to make their sufferings more distressing. So too with souls undergoing this spiritual trial. All their natural and supernatural perfections, their singular graces and delightful favors of heaven are in the hands of God, who disposes of them with severity and wisdom to make them a cause of torment and an occasion of distressing affliction.

The creature has an essential relation to God and its being is measured by its dependence upon Him. It seems to souls thus abandoned that they have fallen from their proper state of being, because they no longer have any sensible experience of the divine influence and feel far removed from God's presence. They seek only God, but since they do not find Him as He usually presents Himself here below, that is, neither in themselves nor in other creatures, they cannot rest in anything at all. They do not know what they ought to do or to whom to turn. With the help of grace they had contracted the habit of keeping themselves in God's presence and of placing in Him all their desires, activity, and rest. Now this has changed and they find them-

selves alone. Because of the cessation of their ecstatic outpourings, they must thus live, as it were, apart from God.

For such souls this is worse than hell. It is not so much that they no longer have access to His Majesty, but that they are obliged to consider themselves as seemingly banished from the order of divine love and reduced to their natural and lowest estate, whose existence they had completely forgotten. However much they know that God is wondrously present in all things, they act toward Him as if He were another. Thus Mary Magdalen unwittingly spoke to her beloved Master as if He were a simple gardener. The knowledge of souls reduced to this state of desolation may be called a nocturnal knowledge. It does not deprive these souls of union with the divinity nor of the disposition required for this union. The properties of the knowledge of divine things are to enlighten, to rejoice, and to serve as a direction but the soul's knowledge during this dreadful trial is not strong enough to direct them, and instead of bringing delight, causes horror in the faculties. To conclude: the light experienced by these souls conspires toward their unhappiness and their perfections are given over into the hands of their Creator so that He can cause suffering in those whom He loves.

CHAPTER 44 &

Rebellion of Nature

IN THE first book of his Dialogues, Sulpicius Severus tells a remarkable story about one of his contemporaries, a prelate of exceptional virtue and noted for his austerity. He enjoyed a great reputation for holiness and because of his power over devils, a great number of those afflicted by diabolic possession were brought to him. A blessing or prayer from him, and the possessed were miraculously released from their horrible affliction. It happened one day that he was tempted to vanity on hearing himself praised for his power. He was terrified at this and it seemed to him that possession by demons would be less dangerous and horrible than to be guilty of vanity and presumption. The faces of the devils were less ugly to him than the face of pride. He felt more secure when dealing with evil spirits than when dealing with vanity. Therefore, he petitioned God in fervent prayer, accompanied by fasting, vigils, tears, and sighs, that He answer his request. The prayer was granted him, but in a strange manner, for he who had commanded devils was himself possessed by them; he who had driven them from others' bodies by the rite of exorcism, was himself subjected to their cruel tyranny and was taken to other holy persons and led from church to church to be exorcised. Being now an instrument of the devil, he made all the grimaces, assumed all the revolting positions, and suffered all the horrible seizures that he had cured in countless others who had been similarly afflicted.

So it sometimes happens that certain souls whom long experience with the secret and inscrutable ways of God in matters of the soul has confirmed in the gratuitous grace called the discernment of spirits, by which they know themselves and others and can discern the safe ways to travel in the advance toward perfection, must themselves seek direction from others. And how distressing it is for souls which have attained a high degree of virtue to be obliged to submit themselves to those who are less perfect in order to learn the first rudiments of the spiritual life and to put them into practice like so many novices or clumsy apprentices making their first steps in the purgative way. Firmly convinced of the vanity of all that is not God, of the misery of disorderly desires and the perverse inclinations of fallen nature, and of the unhappiness of sin, the holy soul has resolutely and repeatedly renounced all these things. Then imagine its keen spiritual torment when, thinking itself as far removed from such things as heaven is from hell, it finds itself harassed anew and disturbed by thoughts, desires, inclinations, and passions which are as shameful as they are harmful and which almost make the soul despair of ever again regaining its former state. When it would raise itself to God for consolation in its misery, it perceives that all avenues leading to Him are closed. And even if they were open, so great is the obscurity and darkness in its understanding that it could not see them, while the slackness of its will rules out any attempt to look for them.

The desolation of the will in this state cannot well be explained. The lights it receives from the understanding are calculated to increase its unhappiness in this intolerable

abandonment. In addition, there is a general rebellion in all the faculties which depend on the will, so that each of these is inclined to follow its natural bent rather than obey as it formerly did. Divine sweetness used to stimulate its appetite and awaken its thirst; now the affective inclination begins to be an insupportable cross, because in proportion as the soul would raise itself in loving transport to the blessed source of eternity, it is held fast to earth by the weight of its animal nature.

Thus the soul is abandoned to strange interior trials and must struggle against the rebellion of its passions and the mutiny in its lower nature. In previous trials it was struck only from afar and by an external enemy, and the soul had both offensive and defensive arms. Now, however, it is disarmed of its forces, that is, God suspends its interior acts so that the soul may find no other support but God Himself. The faculties, which were principles of actions and of operations, become the desolate centers of suffering and if the soul acts at all, it is only so that they can suffer.

God's justice, assisted by His wisdom and omnipotence, ordains that the damned shall not find rest in themselves, in creatures, or in God. Not within themselves, because their ugliness makes them objects of their Creator's wrath and because of the horrible disorders which are found in all their faculties. They find no rest in creatures either, for these exist for the glory of Him to whom the damned wish an eternal evil and against whom they feel a raging hatred and everlasting aversion. Less still can the damned rest in God, both for the reasons already mentioned and because He appears to them only as fearful and as one who inspires terror.

Similarly, the holy soul in the harsh embrace of love does not know what to think or where to lavish its affection so that it may find, if not rest, at least some refreshment and the chance to catch its breath. No creature, not even a flaming seraphim, can satisfy it, if only because no creature is the Beloved. We are dealing here with a generous soul that has made the renunciation which Christ demands of those who would be His disciples. To achieve this renunciation the soul foregoes any alliance with creatures by way of complacency since this would be to indulge the senses and foster self-love; rather, the soul makes abnegation its greatest glory. To this end it desires to embrace anything that will not attract and satisfy its natural inclinations.

As a result of this brave resolution it is not only difficult but even impossible for the soul to take pleasure in anything that is not God. This impossibility, however, is not like that which is proper to the blessed, who are confirmed in their actual adherence to God, but it is that impossibility of which we speak when we say that under certain circumstances a thing cannot be done. Some souls have become so habituated to evil that they find it almost impossible to return to God. Perhaps they were once illumined by great lights and tasted the sweetness of grace, but now they have fallen miserably into a state wherein they are confirmed in evil. In much the same way the holy soul, weaned from all human consolations by its habit of contemplating God in prayer, contracts an impossibility of being separated from charity either by things present or those which are to come.

The holy soul might well say to those who observe the great change that has occurred: "Do not be surprised that you no longer see my former beauty. If I have changed my rich robes and rare jewels for sackcloth, a horrid hairshirt, and coarse garments; if a hard board and uncomfortable mattress serve as my bed; if now I desire to be humiliated more than I formerly desired honors; if my face is emaciated

from fasting, my cheeks sunken from abstinence, my eyes worn out by vigils and weeping, and all my members broken by discipline and wasted away by austerity, the reason lies in the love I bear my Beloved.

"I have raised my eyes to the Sun of glory affixed to the cross during the high noon of His ardent love. Who would not be burned by the force of His divine rays? His cruelly painful thorns have condemned me to the hairshirt. His nails make me the slave of the Crucified, so that I may bear their image in all my thoughts. His bonds compel me to choose the cloister, the cell, and solitude. This frightful spectacle hanging before my eyes separates me from all things, so that I have no attachment but to it alone. The world will henceforth be my cross, and I its cross. It will find its coffin in my heart and its death in my soul. Yet it will also be my sepulchre and in it I shall become completely insensible to all delights. It will be my torment and I its punishment. Our mutual antipathy will cause it to find in me only that from which it most recoils, while I will see in it that which fills me with aversion."

These souls, then, are unable to find their consolation in creatures, nor do they wish to do so. The soul which was once a paradise of delights is now an inferno of suffering in which all its faculties are instruments of its martyrdom. If it tries to practice the virtues which are opposed to the inclinations of fallen humanity in its animal nature, it derives scarcely any relief. Must it then remain in its inferior nature which is so filled with evil inclinations and upset by dangerous disorders? Conscience does not permit this, for fear of offending God. Hence, if the soul does not want to lose God, it cannot rest for a moment amid such dangers.

Impatience often raises its head. As weak nature is left to itself and deprived of sensible heavenly influences and as

all things conspire to the soul's complete desolation, the soul is inclined to flee its inferior part in disgust. Instead of the sweet inclinations which tenderly ravished the soul and the caresses of holy love whose flames steadily burned away its imperfections and fortified its potencies and feelings, the soul finds itself full of bitter disgust and aversion and is tempted to rebellion against the adorable will of the living God. Again, it was not without some consolation, although with considerable pain and struggle, that it exercised acts of faith, hope, patience, indifference, conformity, humility, and modesty, but now nature revolts and girds itself against the soul. The higher faculties seem to have vanished because of the cessation of their acts, and the practical judgment is unable to distinguish necessity from liberty, consent from feeling, and nature from grace.

From this come the agonizing doubts that the soul's repugnance and revolt of nature may be voluntary and deliberate. However, the soul is as far from voluntary control in this state as it was when immersed in the delicious outpourings of divine love. There is, however, this difference: in the state of desolation the faculties cannot be used easily, promptly, or pleasantly. It is enough, therefore, that the suffering soul consider itself as if separated from its own nature and that it yield to the divine operation so that the man die and be annihilated to himself. The soul should also realize that there remains in it a secret impression of God's loving operation so that the soul can maintain itself and give its consent.

CHAPTER 45 K

Abandonment by God

WHILE carried along on the torrents of divine consolations, David declared that the ardor of his flames would transport him steadily toward love. "For besides You, my God," he said, "what is there in heaven or upon earth that can satisfy the ardent desires of my heart? You will be my peerless King, my unrivalled Spouse, my only God. During this pact, which I wish to be eternal, if I am Yours entirely, You will be entirely mine. You will be my lot, my inheritance, my beauty, my riches, my sufficiency, my all." Yet, after such warm sentiments. David was forced to lament bitterly because of the confusion of his mind, the terrible afflictions of his soul, and the desperate sufferings of his heart. These things took place when God withdrew His hand from David and caused him to experience in all his faculties a distress and desolation equal to the copious floods of consolation which he had formerly received.

Thus we see that some spiritual persons defy hell itself and challenge the devils to battle. Their constancy surmounts all difficulties, their patience outlasts the keenest sufferings, and their confidence exercises an absolute command over nature. Souls of extraordinary zeal who attend more to things outside the body than within, are more separated from the world than living in it. Their life is jubilation; their sighs, transports; their words, oracles; their thoughts, profound contemplation; and their actions, miracles. Uncreated love is their element and their happy abode. But when the divine Spouse is pleased to withdraw His hand, those divine favors which flooded the soul, those operations which raised them in a marvelous way above nature, and all the extraordinary graces which made them look like miracles of perfection, are changed into earthly passions, vile and base movements of nature, and perverse inclinations of corrupt human nature.

In the preceding chapter we did not state that the desolate soul, which can find no repose in creatures or self, cannot find consolation even in God. It knows that He is within it and in all things, but it does not experience Him there as Friend. Rather, like a jealous husband, God seems to be assuring Himself of the soul's complete affection, purifying it from all traces of its ugliness, and weaning it from all self-love. He wishes in this way to dispose the soul for a love which the mystics call the love of fruition. Although the soul realizes that this state is only a cruel trial which serves as a preparation for the sublime life of holy love, this in no way lessens the agonizing pain which it suffers.

The soul does not believe that any creature in the whole world could be more miserable than itself. In the midst of other trials it had known some relief, but now it feels so greatly afflicted that it cannot see how God Himself could possibly console it, even if He might wish to do so. Speaking through the mouth of His holy prophet, God once expressed His displeasure that He had become a desert or a solitude to the people of Israel; now, but in a different sense, this could be said of the holy soul. It seems to the soul that not only have the good angels abandoned it, the saints do

not hear its prayers, and its friends are so many monsters, but that God, who is sufficiency itself, is a sterile desert as far as the soul is concerned.

These souls see horrible spectres within and outside themselves which represent the gloomy shadows of eternal death. Their imagination is filled with thoughts of blasphemy, impiety, hatred of God, and envy at His infinitely adorable perfections. The heart feels movements of anger on being confronted by His incomprehensible goodness and is moved, but not without horror, to other passions which one would hesitate to attribute to the most hardened of criminals. The soul is impelled to sudden desires, frenzied lust, and unreasonable wrath. Yet all this is done according to a heavenly plan that is hidden from the eyes of men. God knows that these souls are superior to all the forces of earth; that hell must confess its weakness in the face of their magnanimous resolves; that their zeal is defiant of the demons; that all their previous trials were easy for them. God knows that after a thousand victories over fierce enemies, these souls are fresher than ever before, as if past trials served only to increase their courage. Knowing that nothing can now inflict real suffering upon them except scorn and hatred of God, blasphemies against His holy name, despair at His inscrutable judgments, God permits them to endure just such impulses. The all-wise and loving God desires these souls to pass through this frightful ordeal which is so incompatible with the state of loving souls who act and suffer on so high a plane.

The soul experiences in the irascible passions all those malicious results which these passions usually cause in those who yield to their tyranny. The mind is filled with doubts about divine providence, scorn for heaven, and derision for God's judgments. In the heart there arises a hellish kind of

obstinacy and a strong inclination to live and die in final impenitence. Not even the most brazen harlot or the most debauched youth have ever actually committed such vile deeds as those which are now represented in their imagination and which exert a greater effect on the concupiscence than if one were to find himself actually in the occasions of these sins, although the soul detests them with horror.

Concupiscence, which had formerly been so mortified that it appeared to have no movement, now awakens as if from the sleep of death and is violently agitated. Reason is filled with confusion and does not even know what is happening in the higher part of the soul. It does not know that its martyrdom arises from its refusal to consent to horrors that are more abominable than frightening. It feels that it does give its consent and its resulting anguish prevents it from seeing that it does not. It fails to see that this type of cross is due to resistance to such abominations on the part of the superior understanding and the will. If all the powers of the soul were to give their consent at this point, the soul's suffering would cease completely. One might then take some pleasure in temptations which are of lesser importance, such as the temptation to fleshly delights, for it is natural that an afflicted spirit seek exterior consolation unless prevented from so doing by a mighty grace from the Holy Ghost.

God's behavior is truly remarkable. After much testing of the soul whereby He disposes it for great perfection and after winning from it a determination to abandon itself to His good pleasure at any cost and for whatever duration in time and eternity, He puts an end to the higher operations of the soul and its loving occupation with the exercises of divine love. He weakens its powers of judgment and reason and restricts its activity under ordinary grace. Having lost

the peace and tranquillity wherein it was accustomed to enjoy the ecstatic touch of love and be ravished by its ineffable operation, it finds itself far removed from that sublime state. All evil things return and the passions make themselves felt again with as much or more energy than ever before. The soul thus finds itself as inept at overcoming these things as in the first months of its conversion, because God holds back inspirations of His grace which are so necessary for the acts of virtue. However, the soul is being strengthened secretly in a way unknown to it, by a strength proportioned to the greatness of its trials and the perfection to which God will raise the soul.

Humbled until it is almost filled with its own perverse inclination, agitated with rage and anger, and overcome with impatience, the soul is inclined to revolt against God and to vent its spleen upon everything. Unable to do this, it concentrates on its own sufferings, which causes it intense displeasure and affliction. Its spiritual martyrdom is made more bitter because the holy soul, which had thought itself to be as far from the disorderliness of nature as heaven is from earth, finds itself suddenly plunged into it, although it had been so careful of its purity and so jealous in its loyalty to God. It thinks either that it has caused its own misfortune or that it has not resisted as strongly as it should have. The soul fears that, hemmed in as it is on all sides by the danger of offending God, it may happen to turn back because of the trials which would call for perseverance greater than that of a seraphim. The thought of calling upon divine mercy for deliverance seems to be a type of disorderly nature more dangerous than the others, for under pretext of having recourse to God during temptation, it would be seeking to escape the harsh ministrations of holy charity.

Hence, the soul does not yield to its desire for consolation in the agony which is necessary for eradicating all traces of imperfection, thereby allowing the activity of divine love despite the impatience of nature. It is convinced that whatever the cost, nature must yield to grace, man to God, instinct and human desire to the divine plan. It cannot, however, make a formal act of resignation to this just and reasonable plan. It cannot even produce an act of acknowledgment and gratitude that would give it the assurance of acquiring a holy indifference to all things and conformity to God's will.

But the most cruel trial of all is to make acts of quiet resignation. As if acknowledging its state and the result of it, the soul practices patience while being impatient, is peaceful though disturbed, silent in the midst of trouble and confusion, indifferent to scorn, mild in the face of rage. To put it another way, it shows patience when impatient at its impatience, peace amid the misgivings of its concern, silence amid the vexations of its confusion, indifference in its dislike of dislike, and it is pliable notwithstanding its rage. But it does not know this, because its submission is tacit rather than expressed. Reflecting on God's merits and its own obligations toward Him, it sees how everything, even irrational beings, praises and glorifies God and that those who are especially dedicated to His service discharge this duty with an ardent and urgent love.

The glory of God and the soul's good would not be furthered if the soul could understand this mysterious action. Without saying a word, the soul need only allow it to continue to run its course, achieving its purpose of purgation and probation, of perfection and temptation, of consummation and trial. God wants to rid the holy soul of any assurance it may have acquired, while enjoying His sweet

favors, of having completely done away with the perverse inclinations of its nature. He wishes to produce in the soul the same easy inclination toward supernatural activity that it had in the natural order when seeking out the goods proper to its human nature. He is therefore pleased once more to awaken that nature and the disorderliness which had been buried in it beneath heavenly consolations. After it has been purged of all that remains of its malice and rage, that nature will then truly die. The soul must not falter under its long trial, but must endure all with patience, faith, and silence, putting into practice the words: "Thy will be done," even when it is unable even to utter the words.

Blessed is the soul that has given the keys of its house to holy love, completely abandoning itself to that love, willing to do all that is necessary to attain perfection, giving no thought either to its mind or its body, to goods, honor, friends, or parents. It wants nothing but that which is neccessary for its own greatest perfection. This step taken, it remains without motion, attentive and occupied in its work. It is enough that the soul does not resist God's will in anything that He would do; it would consider it a kind of sacrilege to flee from the singular providence of such a love, and it would be doing just that if it were to worry about itself.

Yet all this reasoning vanishes from its mind during its harsh trial, because it no longer remembers the graces and favors which God had formerly lavished upon it. The sublime knowledge and understanding it had once known leave nothing in the memory to show that they had once been understood. Or if some memory of the past remains, it is as a dream, because the understanding is darkened and the will becomes progressively more sluggish.

God may also permit demons to oppose the soul so that

a greater crown may be won by the soul whom God thus helps to victory, as happened when He permitted Satan to try the constancy of Job. That is why the devil sometimes binds all the faculties until the soul is no longer its own master. However much it struggles not to, it can think only of the wicked images and horrible thoughts he suggests to it. He saps its strength and weakens its powers until it cannot turn to things that lead or dispose it to God. It becomes, as it were, the demon's plaything, like St. Teresa, who had to endure an unparalleled uncertainty and anxiety because of the devil.

How could this soul ask God for help, seeing that He hides Himself from it? Where is it to find confidence and hope amid thoughts of despair? The agony which it suffers does not even permit it to say "Lord, this is too much," or to assert firmly, like Job, that it will have recourse to faith and will persevere as a loyal Christian, notwithstanding the seemingly all-powerful assailants who attack it. So deep is its sleep that one might think it dead, for it lives only on the surface. Whatever knowledge it retains of God is like something afar off, something to which it once agreed in other times. If anyone speaks of it, the soul listens with indifference. It wishes that God be all that He is, because others say so, but it has no memory of having previously experienced His infinite goodness. The esteem it once had for His lovable grandeurs is gone; the ecstasy produced by His beauty has been taken away.

Such a soul would wish to find solitude, but solitude only intensifies its misery and gives the devils an opportunity to redouble their attack where even the place is to their advantage. There they have only to concentrate on a single soul that is deprived of tangible helps to defend itself. Moreover, such a retreat, without grace and without God, is pre-

cisely the atmosphere where melancholy is nourished, grows, and becomes strong. There is no relief for it in reading a good book, for it does not understand what it reads. The thought of conversing with men makes things still worse. The devil inspires such rage and disgust in the heart and will that if the soul were to follow its natural instinct, it would rather blaspheme, murmur, and complain about the trial sent from God, than submit humbly to His lovingly severe mode of operation.

Possibly the soul may seek from a confessor, director, or superior the comfort which thus far it has been unable to find. Alas, this hope is also vain. God already knows what these would say and He uses them as His instruments throughout the trial of those whom He has brought under their guidance. The graces and lights necessary for directors of souls are ordinarily of little profit to themselves, but are distributed by God to bring about the advancement and perfection of the souls confided to them.

Not infrequently directors lead the soul to ends which the directors do not themselves know. They sometimes teach others things they would never venture to do themselves or they may lead others to places which they themselves will never reach. They work out difficulties which they could not penetrate for themselves. Those whom they govern are like wide reservoirs into which divine graces are poured in abundant measure, but they themselves are, perhaps, mere canals which retain nothing of that which God causes to flow through them.

Directors often make decisions which run contrary to their own mind in the matter. They do not always give the reasonable and prudent answers they had thought out beforehand. Their treatments may be entirely dissimilar to their own mood and ordinary manner of acting. They may be holy and upright men, kind and balanced, but how brusque they are with this desolate soul. They scold it, accuse it of impertinence, and upbraid it for its lack of resignation in accepting the trials that beset it. They may begin to have doubts as to the soul's true status; they become suspicious, and worry lest the soul, deceived by Satan, lead others astray. Often they have no patience with its long tale of misery or feel such aversion that they cannot decide on anything that will help the soul.

The soul is easily persuaded that its directors have good reasons to act as they do. Since everything conspires to increase the soul's misery, it begins to fear that it is obsessed by evil spirits. It fears that it may be punished for its past sins by being abandoned to hardness of heart, scorn for God, and impiety. And because the sin of impurity is ordinarily the punishment for proud souls, it does not know whether the fires of concupiscence enkindled in it are sent by God for the practice of patience or as a manifestation of His justice, since it is His way to abandon the wicked to the satisfaction of their own desires. It experiences the surgings of contrary passions, such as rage, fury, hatred, envy, concupiscence, and despair. The whole man is torn apart and each faculty is alienated from its object. The intellect pulls in one direction, the will in the other. The irascible passions tend one way and the concupiscible, another. The body is here and the soul there. Each part suffers both from its object and from that which is contrary to it.

To climax this desolation, the soul feels such an overwhelming conviction of its own wickedness that it blames its own imagined infidelities as the cause of all the sins of the world. Rebellions, schisms, revolts, heresies, wars, and all the disorders of the world become for it so many punishments which its sins have justly deserved. It makes itself guilty of all that is displeasing to the goodness of God and of all that provokes His vengeful justice. It seems to the soul that God is putting everything to the fire and sword; He appears in the awesome might of offended and justly angered Majesty, as He will appear to the damned on the day of judgment.

The tragic situation continues. Learned men and devout religious will add to the soul's torment by looking upon it with great scorn in its pitiable condition. It is a laughing-stock in the best of company and serious persons censure it severely. Theologians cannot find anything like it in their books on mystical phenomena. Directors feel they have sufficient grounds for making inquiries and carefully investigating its life. It is questioned about things it does not understand. Church authorities do not wish to listen to it; its close friends drive it to despair; religious-minded people abandon it; its spiritual directors are changed; and its confessor removed.

Then comes calumny and all its pernicious helpers to make the most of the situation. False rumors are circulated which are capable of disturbing the minds of the most devout. Anything human minds cannot understand is criticized as witchcraft and magic. All exterior austerities are judged to be so many false fronts or masks of a secret laxity, and its fastings and mortifications become clever moves to allay in men's minds the suspicion of its hidden vileness. Those who laugh at the soul are held to be most moderate and even the wisest of men will attribute the soul's torments to melancholy.

The soul is everywhere harassed and abandoned and does not know whether or not it has lost its mind. Banished and ostracized, it is everywhere the target of fury, and this is but an outline of the depths to which the soul is reduced in its abandonment. The same power which will on the last day arm nature against the wicked, now commands it to rise up to afflict the soul whom divine love is preparing for a participation in the favors which this kind of adversity deserves.

CHAPTER 46 K

Suspension of Self-Knowledge

THERE is nothing so holy that it cannot be profaned by men. This happens most often in the matter of divine love, which at first is exercised with purity of intention and detachment from all things and from self in order to please God alone. But it can deteriorate bit by bit and undergo an imperceptible change. Instead of loving God for God, a man may in the end love Him out of self-love and, by an intolerable abuse, his complacency in the divine perfections may degenerate into a shameful, disordered affection for the pleasure that results from the exercise of that love. One will love love, not for the love which is in God, but for the love which is directed toward self. It is then not so much God's good pleasure that is loved, but the human pleasure with which one satisfies his own love. One does not love God, but His love, and one does not love this love so much as he does the pleasure that results from it.

Therefore, to safeguard the purity of the soul's love, divine providence wisely and skilfully removes the pleasure attached to love and replaces it with a thousand vexations so that the heart is burdened with a great weariness, does not perceive the value of sufferings, and finds no satisfaction in its works, in itself, or in Him for whom it acts and suffers. Slowly and gradually leading the soul through the trials mentioned above, or others like them, God finishes the work He has begun in the soul by taking from it even the certitude that it believes, hopes, or loves its God. The anguish which fastens upon the soul prevents it from being able to reflect or to understand what it is doing. Torn from the mind is the realization of its blessedness in being in the state of grace and the knowledge of the purity of the love to which it is being raised, the eminence of the holiness which is being perfected in it, and the goal of this inscrutable providence.

The loving soul does not understand that God is reducing it almost to a state of despair in order to manifest the power of the grace by which He fortifies all the soul's powers. Moreover He wishes not so much to exercise as to satisfy its charity, the ardor of which proves its capacity to suffer. The soul wishes nothing more fervently than to further God's glory, to praise Him, to love Him, to rejoice in His perfections and service. But since the only things that could afflict the soul are despair, hatred, and scorn of His immense goodness, God desires that the soul feel these effects inwardly and that its aversion for them should be an occasion of suffering. As the attacks from the passions are more violent, the resistance of the soul is greater, and thus the soul's love of God, in a hidden manner, becomes more deeply rooted and gains greater mastery.

The soul would be encouraged if it knew that nothing will happen to it in this state, that it was actually more loved by God, or that God has accepted the voluntary offers it had made to Him in times of consolation and joy. But the love which produced all those promises and gave birth to all those resolutions is now hidden. As a crowning blow,

the soul is deprived of the consolation which one usually has in the midst of sufferings, namely, the hope that they will come to an end. In this spiritual trial the soul is unable to think of its end or to think of how it can be delivered. The clamorous cries of its lower nature and the great dejection of its spirit deprive it of any assurance that even God Himself could ever console it.

The soul therefore feels that it has neither faith, hope, nor charity, or that it retains only the vestiges of these virtues. Almost unconsciously it is aware of their influence, but it is as if they were far off. It has lost its skill in turning back to God and it lacks the energy to make acts of love which would cause it to fly rather than walk on the path of perfection. It had been making marvelous progress and gaining substantial victories and untold merits, but now it grovels in the dust, overburdened with frightful miseries.

During this time, try as it may, the soul will learn only that this trial comes from God and that it can do nothing but allow Him to finish His work and to contribute what little it can. It must remain resigned to God's will, like a little child who does not yet have the use of his will to desire or love anything but the face of his dear mother. The child does not think of being with anyone else nor does he want to be any place else but in his mother's arms. It is not a question of striving to conform his will to hers; he does not feel his own will or even think of it, but leaves it to his mother to do whatever she thinks is good for him. This comparison comes from *The Love of God*, a book written by St. Francis de Sales, the illustrious bishop of Geneva, who has accurately described what the soul should do during this loving but severe trial. He writes as follows:

"We must not say that the will acquiesces in that of God, because acquiescence is an act of the soul which declares its consent. We must not say that it accepts or receives, because accepting and receiving are a kind of action, in a certain sense passive actions, by which we embrace and accept what happens. We must not say that it permits, as even permission is an act of the will, and hence is a certain inactive willing, which does not do and yet lets be done. It seems to me that the soul which is in this state of holy indifference and which wills nothing, but lets God do whatever pleases Him, should be said to have its will in a simple and general state of waiting, since waiting is not a doing or an acting but only an expectancy or disposition for some event. But notice that this waiting of the soul is indeed voluntary, and yet it is not an action, but a simple disposition to receive whatever shall happen." 1

These words, so full of divine eloquence, are overflowing with love. In his moving description of the disposition of the soul and the resignation it must practice during its desolation, St. Francis de Sales shows us that he has learned and even experienced the fact that at this stage the soul is no less God's and that God is no less near the soul than before. On the contrary, He reproduces perfectly in the soul what took place in the soul of His Son during His sorrowful passion, for God was never nearer His Son than when He cried out from the cross that He had been abandoned.

¹ The Love of God, Book IX, chap. 15.

CHAPTER 47 K

Job, a Model of Spiritual Suffering

NO ONE would ever believe that such harsh trials were directed by a holy love, if he did not stop to consider how closely they were duplicated in God's treatment of His servant Job. Without allowing Job to slip from His loving embrace, He delivered him into the hands of Satan. This He did in order to try Job and to make him an outstanding example of the desolations to which holy love reduces any soul which aspires to a perfect imitation of the sorrows of Jesus.

Job's whole body was covered with the sores and wounds inflicted upon him by a raging enemy. His flesh was eaten by worms, boils formed on all his limbs, gangrene ate away at his flesh, and only his tongue and heart remained sound. His imagination, however, was filled with horrible thoughts. Job cursed the workings of God, insulted His justice, doubted the wisdom of His providence, was moved to despair, and was shaken by rage and the base inclinations of nature. He cursed the day he was brought into the world, and the night in which he was born.

"Alas," he lamented, "why did I not die in the womb of my mother? Why did You not close the avenues to my conception? Would I not have been better off had I greeted death as soon as I was born; if, when I opened my eyes to the light, I had closed them in farewell? Why did my nurse fondle me on her knees, rock me to sleep on her bosom, or allow me to draw my first nourishment from her breast, if I am to be unconsoled now, when I lament and cry out in sadness that the arrows of the Lord pierce my soul through and through? Would that I could be consoled by the one hope remaining to me-death. Now that He has begun, let Him finish quickly. Let Him display the strength of His arm and, by slaying me with a single stroke, reduce the number of the living. I am abandoned in my weakness. My best friends have withdrawn from me and the graces of heaven have fled from me like the waters of the torrential rain, which disappear in a short time and leave ruin and desolation in their wake. At night I awaken trembling, filled with horror at my dreams. I am tempted to do away with myself, and my very soul is tired of living. This is too much to suffer! I wish to die. Slay me once and for all, without all this delay.

"What a sad state I am in. A short while ago I lived amid plenty, caressed by all imaginable bliss; now I am suddenly cast miserably to the earth. God Himself led me, my hand in His, but now He has entangled me in the snares of my enemy and delivered me into bloody hands. That magnificent glory with which He once honored me He has now dimmed and I am the recipient of every kind of evil. And as if it were not enough that one of His lances should cause me to languish, He has joined them all together to pierce my heart and break it into pieces. He has added wound after wound, blow after blow, arrow after arrow, affliction after affliction, and then, not knowing what more to do, He has Himself fallen upon me like a giant intent on crushing me

and snuffing out my life by His weight. He has despoiled me of glory and has deprived me of the crown I had once merited by many hard-won victories. I am like a tree uprooted from the earth, without any hope of revival or of regaining my former beauty. Robbers have dared to attack me, to besiege the house of my heart, and to put up a wall round about it. He has ordered my brethren to depart from me and the servants of my household look upon me as a stranger passing by. My wife cannot endure my foul breath and my advisors judge me to be accursed. The one whom above all others I had raised to the highest favor has turned his back upon me and ignorant men have made sport of me and destroyed my reputation."

Behold the sad extremity to which holy Job was reduced. His words are a summation of the varying degrees of the trials of which we have been speaking. His heaviest cross lay, not in the fact that Satan could cause him external sufferings, but that while the enemy labored so diligently to bring about his cruel martyrdom, God Himself began to be for him an interior principle of pain and the cause of a desolation whose agony surpasses the most rigorous sufferings possible to man on earth.

CHAPTER 48 K

The Divine Plan in Spiritual Suffering

THE Emperor Domitian once commanded that the ceiling, floor, walls, and even the furniture of one of the rooms in his palace be painted black. This done, he invited certain important persons to meet there. When they had taken their places, each guest was presented with a small marble coffin to which was attached a tiny lamp similar to those placed on tombs. On each coffin was inscribed the name of the guest to whom it was given. Then a band of youths entered the room, their bodies painted black so that they resembled vengeful demons rather than human beings. They performed a frightening dance and when they had finished, they cast themselves at the feet of the guests, where they acted out the burial rites customary at funerals. At this the emperor's guests were seized with terror, suspecting that this was an elaborate preparation for their own funeral and that at the end of this macabre ceremony, Domitian would have them all slain.

To the surprise of the guests, Domitian dismissed them, but only after he had sent away their servants, who had been waiting for their masters at the door of the palace. When the guests saw that strange men had been appointed by the emperor to bear them home in their litters, their fears redoubled, as did their terror. When they had been deposited at their homes with no greater discomfort than that of fear, a new alarm awaited them. They were informed that messengers stood at the door asking for them in the name of the emperor. They were then certain that their last hour had come and that they were to die. But instead of harming them, the messengers presented each man with a precious gift in the name of the emperor.

We can learn from this morbid jest of Domitian how God acts when He sets about to dispose a soul for a lofty degree of perfection. However, an even better example can be found in the way in which Joseph treated his brothers when they came to Egypt to seek grain during the famine in their own country.

Anything that troubles a holy soul is in reality only a game or test. Its fear deserves to be called a favor rather than a disgrace; its sufferings are less the effect of severity than they are sources of merit; and their trials are means to the most intimate union with God in proportion as they effect a greater separation from any good that is not God. God Himself enters into the game by disposing for all those trying circumstances which render the soul so worthy of pity. God Himself, however, has no pity on them.

Indeed, it seems to the loving soul that God asks the same question that Jesus thrice asked St. Peter: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" Peter was saddened at the repeated question, which was like salt in his wounds, although it did give him a chance to make amends, by the triple avowal of love, for his threefold denial of the Master. God, however, is not content to subject a soul three times to the severe test of love in order to elicit its protestations of loyalty. He gives it no respite or chance to breathe, but con-

The Divine Plan in Spiritual Suffering 301

tinues to question it until its love is so pure that it cannot endure anything, however insignificant, that is foreign or contrary to perfect union. To gain this perfect union, the soul is subjected to a painful and desolating trial.

Be brave, devout soul. Nothing can break the just man's courage. The things that torment your soul are accidental to it. Destroy sin, the very memory of which is more painful to you than hell itself, and your soul will be so strong that neither crosses nor desolation nor any trial can separate it from the charity which unites it to God.

Take comfort, Isaac. The pile of faggots prepared for you is raised up by the hands of him who gave you life. The sword destined for your throat is to be used, not by a cruel executioner, but by a good father. The resolution to slay you, the cruel preparations, and the horror-stricken face of your father must not overwhelm your soul with fear and trembling. You are Abraham's son and he is your father. A good father can think only loving thoughts and have good things in mind for his child. Look into Abraham's heart, Isaac, and lift your eyes above your father's arm and see how his heart is ruled by love. Look away from the flashing knife and admire the weight of his love. The bonds with which he fastens your hands are weakness when compared to the loving chains which bind you to his heart. Your father is most concerned about you and all the harsh demands he makes of you only bring you more intimately into his love. Which will exert the stronger hold over you—his love or his sword? Will the pile of faggots be victorious over the living flames that burn in a breast which has no other food for its fire than the desolation which brings you to such an extreme? Oh desolate child, think not about your sad plight nor upon the ropes which bind you. Keep looking at your father and let him take care of everything. Await

his good pleasure. Let his will suffice for you, for it is the will of an excellent father for an excellent son and it can only be good.

Nothing can now harm Isaac but his own father. The knife will not move to produce its effect unless he applies it to act; if he does not light the fire of the altar, it will not burn. But these things do not afflict Isaac so much as the sight of his father, whose face, eyes, words, and gestures speak only of the death and sacrifice of a beloved son.

What I am trying to say is that sometimes a holy soul has no other cross but God. It understands by an intellectual light that in some ineffable but real way, God is pleased to crucify it invisibly. The resultant suffering surpasses in intensity anything it would have suffered previously. Until now its sufferings were measured by the instruments which God had employed for this purpose; but now God Himself acts, invading the soul's very being and faculties. He does not wish to share with the soul the sweetness of His presence, the sensible helps of His friendship, or the ecstasy of union. He wishes to cause the soul to experience a harshness befitting an angry God filled with displeasure toward His creature, rather than a God filled with love and boundless good-will in its regard.

The soul now understands that He is its God and that He can just as easily make it a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor. He who has created it out of goodness has the power to annihilate it for His own glory. If in times past He was pleased to display His extraordinary riches and sweet pleasures in the soul, in order to manifest His great glory, He is equally free now to afflict the soul with the most exquisite suffering. This He does in order to give it a taste of the unmitigated misery that is felt in hell, where His justice is exercised without any hope of mercy. The soul

The Divine Plan in Spiritual Suffering 303

feels constrained to reproach Him lovingly by saying: "You also are a part of my trials. If I must pay this price for the delights I once knew, would it not have been better for me had You never looked at me with those eyes which were for me the living sources of my first happiness?"

Deeply shocked, the soul begins to understand by experience the appalling significance of those words of the Holy Spirit, who declared that no man can resist the wrath of that God before whom the supports of the universe totter and give way.¹ The soul understands why Jesus cried out on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?" It learns that His most painful cross was the fact that the Eternal Father personally applied Himself to His soul, in order to fulfill the figure of Abraham and Isaac. Having substituted Jesus for Isaac, the heavenly Father proposed to effect in Christ's soul what Abraham had intended to do to the body of Isaac.

It is indeed strange that the Father should hide His face from His Son. He manifested Himself to Jesus only as an all-powerful judge who inspired terror because of His avenging justice. In Jesus' soul, then, He was a cause of dread and terror, of anxiety and fright, so that the incarnate Son of God might know the infinite severity of divine wrath. Christ had to study that wrath, for His own wrath will be modelled on it when on Judgment Day He comes with the angels in majesty to reveal Himself to the wicked. On the cross, everything that would enable Him to discern a single ray of His Father's beauty was taken from Him, but His faculties and powers were strengthened to see the anger which moved the Father not to spare His own Son.

David glimpsed only the shadow of this wrath when he

¹ Job 9:13.

saw the avenging angel standing on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jubusite, but that was enough almost to strike him dead with fear and he felt the coldness of that fear until the end of his life. Christ's glimpse of His Father's anger filled Him with such terror that His soul would have fled from His body, had not a love that is stronger than fear gained control of His heart.

In order that certain chosen souls might understand the extent of Jesus' sorrows, which no pen can describe nor tongue or thought express, it pleases God to reduce the soul to a state of pure suffering. At the climax of its ecstatic elevation, the soul had seen itself united to God without species or image and without any intermediary at all, to use the language of the mystics. In like manner it now suffers torments which surpass not only the forces of nature but even those of ordinary grace. It is convinced that their violence goes beyond the sphere of creature activity and therefore feels the need of a strength similar to that which strengthened Jesus during His agony, for the soul understands that God is the instrument as well as the principal cause of its sufferings.

Throughout this kind of interior cross, God unites Himself to the intellect and imagination in order to render the soul insensible there. Sometimes this is brought about by so clear, vivid, and definite knowledge of what afflicts it, that by a kind of overflow the intensity causes the body to be exteriorly tormented, and neither the onlookers nor doctors can know why. All they see is that a seemingly healthy body is experiencing cruelties that exceed anything the most innocent martyr ever suffered at the hands of savage tyrants.











