

TO THE SUFFERING: CONSOLATIONS



BY
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I AS IT WAS NOT GOD WHO MADE THE SUFFERING

God, infinitely good, created man for happiness and wants him to be happy on earth and in eternity. Why, then, do we suffer so much in this world? The Christian religion, and it alone, gives us the key to this mystery.

While he was innocent, man did not know the pain of suffering: he was fully happy in the earthly paradise. In fact, suffering is just a consequence of sin; man suffers because he has become a sinner. As the shadow accompanies the body, so suffering accompanies sin.

It doesn't always follow you right away; sometimes it even seems to be remitted to him in this world; however, sooner or later it will come, and the more terrible the more retarded it is.

Suffering entered the world through the gate of sin and will remain there as long as it reigns, namely, until the final judgment.

This must be understood once and for all and not to attribute to God what does not come from Him.

God is not the author of suffering, misfortunes, tears, just as he is not the author of sin.

It was man, the sinner himself, who was reduced to such a sad condition.

And it is because we descended from sinful man, fallen man, that we lie in the state of misery and decay into which he crashed, We are like the offspring of a dethroned king, born in exile; like the children of an impoverished nobleman, who are born poor like their father.

In short, we are condemned in this world to suffering because we are sinners.

So then, when we suffer, let us not complain about God: let us impute suffering only to sin; to the wicked, who are men of sin; to the devil, instigator of sin; in short, to ourselves who committed it.

II OF HOW, HOWEVER, IN A CERTAIN ASPECT, SUFFERING COMES FROM GOD

In a hospital in Paris, one day, two men of almost the same age were prostrate on a bed of pain from illness, side by side.

One of them was a poor fool, for many years divorced from God by pleasure and lightness; he had lived, as it is commonly said, "on a loose rein," and the heart disease that consumed him came, to all appearances, from his wanton rules. The other, also sick from the chest, had lived an admirably pure life since childhood: after his first communion, he never stopped taking communion on Sundays; at the age of fourteen or fifteen, his fervor, which visibly increased, had brought him even more often to the Eucharistic table. He was pure as an angel, and during his sufferings his lips never uttered a single complaint.

The chaplain and the nurse treated both patients with equal dedication. So it happened that the former, instead of blaspheming and becoming impatient because of excruciating pain, renewed his childhood practices, reconciled with God, and spent the last weeks of his life with feelings of penance, who deeply impressed all his fellow infirmaries. "I suffer a lot, he said; but so much the better: more penance I will do."

The second, sanctified more and more by misfortunes, inspired admiration in all who saw him, always serene and smiling, until the moment of exhaling he thanked God for the grace of having loved him so much.

Both died on the same day; and to both the suffering, poignant and terrible, was evidently a marked benefit from the Lord.

In fact, God, who did not make suffering, uses it to save us. From the evil it takes the good.

To reconcile us with himself, to some extent against our will, He makes use of our sufferings. To those who are completely neglectful of the service of God, sorrows, infirmities and pain have led them back to the path of good. How many of God's elect would be in hell if they had not suffered in this world! And how many reprobates would have been saved if they had had the grace to suffer in life! This is how suffering is marked by grace, which, like all graces, comes from God.

Suffering still comes from God, that's why it's fair.

Justice is excellent in itself, though it is fearful; and to have the sufferings on account of the just and more than just punishment of sin supposes a great deal of faith and elevation of spirits. "Thanks, thanks, my God! exclaimed among the torments a poor apostate from Korea, who had been fortunate enough to acknowledge his guilt and regain his faith; thanks be to you! Even so! It is right! It is right that the sinner should suffer in atonement ." Although it is an evil in itself, suffering comes from God, as the atonement and legitimate punishment that it is.

Finally, suffering comes from God in yet another aspect, namely, that God through him tests the faithfulness of his servants and enhances their merits and their eternal happiness. There is nothing that produces more detachment from the vanities of the world than suffering; nor that more directly cast souls into the arms of God. It is very rare for someone to be very sanctified without suffering much; and so high is the sanctifying influence of suffering, that the holiness of the Christian is more often the direct reason for his sufferings.

From the foregoing, it highlights how divine goodness submits us to the ordeal of suffering, and also the reason why, only moved by mercy, Our Lord allows his dearest children to be the most afflicted.

And so, dear reader, it is important not to repeat that complaint, in truth unreasonable, that suffering brings to the lips of those who suffer: "What have I done to God to deserve so much harm?" What have you done to it? Do you forget then this long series of sins, of mortal sins, which, it may be said, constitute your entire past? Has the light of faith been so dimmed that it's not even enough to show you that mountain of guilt?

What have you done to God? But what had our Lord, the Holy Virgin, the martyrs and all the saints who suffered so much done to her? His sufferings were not punishment, like those of sinners, but probation; and the price of victory in such a trial was the rope of eternal glory in heaven. Whœver you are, righteous or sinful, it is not right for you to ask such a discouraging question. If you are a sinner, behold the eternal fire of Hell, the burning depths of Purgatory; consider the horrible expiations of the Passion and Calvary; and instead of murmuring, I patted my chest humbly and silently. If innocent and just, look at paradise with the eternity of its ineffable bliss; behold the glory of the penitent saints and martyrs; finally, pay attention to the most innocent Jesus, crucified and dying for you.

Pay attention to all this; and filled my heart with hope and love, instead of complaining, bless God instead.

In heaven will be seen the mysterious pattern by which the most merciful Lord used suffering for your true good, and how pain was a divine assistance.

III

OF HOW THE DEMON IS THE RESPONSIBLE AUTHOR OF OUR SUFFERING

Man sinned at the instigation of the devil: it was just that he should be punished; and God punished him by abandoning him, to some extent, to the power of the devil.

If it weren't for lengthening, it would be fitting at this point to explain at length, as all the evil that exists in the world, all the disturbing disorders of nature, any and all destructions, result from the damned influence of that great spirit, created by God to be like that administrator of the entire material world. Such disorders and destructions cannot come from God, who is the infinite order; nor do they come from the angels, who are ministers of peace, order and life; they do not proceed from material elements, devoid of power and movement from themselves: they soon come from that secret and detestable force called the devil, which, since he cannot destroy it, disturbs the beautiful harmony of nature.

So it is that, in more than a thousand ways, which the sages call secondary causes, the author of evil to spaces disturbs the atmosphere and in it produces storms, storms, hail, lightning and all the devastations that accompany them.

This is how, in order to harm man and the most creatures of God, he poisons this and that plant, this and that juice, and lends his fury to some animals.

It is also in this way that, with divine permission, he arouses microscopic animalcules in the air and in the water, which spread over the earth horrible epidemics, those so devastating contagious diseases; the plague, cholera, smallpox, all kinds of fevers, etc.

Medicine and science recognize the effects of these illnesses; they fight and at times limit their damage by means of remedies, in which the beneficial and merciful influx of God and the angels is latent; but faith alone unveils the

invisible cause of all these evils, and discloses the enemy of God and men, the father of evil, the horrible devil, who is hidden like the evildoer that he is. It is the source from which all the evils that we suffer flow from.

More than anyone else; he who must bend under the weight of our indignation when we find ourselves in the grip of perversity and the evil passions of men, it is he alone who incites them to sin.

The envy, the anger, the wickedness that killed Abel, it was he who stirred them up in the heart of Cain; in this way, first of all, he made the man's blood flow and wrung out his first tears. He was, is and will be until the end the instigator of all crimes, all rebellions, all cruelties, all errors, all infamies of mankind. All sin, all disorder is founded on it. That is why the Church, in its energetic and profound language, calls him the doctor of heretics, the teacher of the impudent, the father of liars, the prince of evil.

And his cunning, which rarely fails, consists in always hiding himself and in persuading his unfortunate victims that the evils they suffer come from God. Hence proceeds the blasphemy, extraordinary and abominable mystery, whereby man, when he harms himself or when he is done, cries out and is angry with God, threatens him, and curses his holy name. The blasphemer who curses God is like the individual who, threatened by a murderer and defended by a friend, confused one with the other, and, leaving the murderer untouched, rushed at the friend and killed him.

The devil is, therefore, the secret and universal author of evil, and therefore of suffering. Any and all evils, come directly or indirectly from him; just as any and all goods directly or indirectly come from God. And just as God distributes life to all creatures through the ministry of his faithful angels, so Satan, the greatest of rebellious angels, spreads rebellion, disorder and evil in creation, aided by all other evil angels, who followed in his rebellion. This invisible inta, which resonates with us so painfully, will only end with the world, because the fidelity or infidelity of the angels cannot distort their vocation, which consists in administering or governing the elements of matter. Indeed, it is not in want of power or goodness that the Lord tolerates the evil influx of demons through the centuries; his sovereign wisdom requires it, because the creature cannot change the plans of the creator at its will.

Many see things through a false prism just because they ignore it. I knew a lady, quite pious of many virtues until then, who, having been unable to free a daughter from a terrible disease, lost, so to speak, her faith, believed that God was evil and deaf to her requests, she ceased to serve. -œ spent the rest of his life in dark despair, Unhappy! If she knew, or rather if she wanted to know!

The same happened to an excellent family man, Breton, practicing Christian, who, having consecutively lost his wife and a child, so blindly placed his misfortune to God that, twenty years ago, he divorced himself from prayer and from any religious exercise; he doesn't even go to church anymore.

During the siege of Mans by the Prussians, a lady declared that if they entered the city, she would never again pray or attend Mass. "If, said the wretched madman, they enter, it will be a clear sign that heaven has abandoned us. And then why invoke God any more?"

We must be cautious: against illusions, and that we never impute to God, extremely good, what is the work of the devil and his instruments.

IV

OF HOW, IN THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING, GOD USES THE DEMON TO PROVE AND SANCTIFY US

Even though the devil, the first author of all our sufferings, retains, as has been said, until the end of time, a certain power over creatures, it does not cease to be a miserable slave, which God uses for the realization of your lovely designs. One of the most beautiful pages of Holy Scripture very strikingly proves this.

A contemporary of Moses, there lived in the East a simple and upright man who feared God and avoided evil. His name was Job. All the prosperity of the world smiled on him; his family, numerous and united, consisted of seven sons and three daughters, herds and servants had them without number. Life flowed into her, as lavish and sumptuous as it was full of sanctity.

In thanksgiving for the benefits received, and as an atonement for the sins he and his children might have committed, Job offered a daily sacrifice to the Lord.

"-. Have you seen my servant Job said one day the Lord the devil No one with him pair, is simple and pure, honor God and hate evil."

"- No wonder, replied the devil: today everything comes to you to your satisfaction, and do not tire of sheltering him with happiness. Try to reduce his possessions, and you will see if he continues to bless you."

"—Well then, saith the Lord; I give thee power over all that he hath; respect only his person."

Now the sons and daughters of Job all dined together in the house of the firstborn; and the patriarch's herds peacefully grazed in the surrounding meadows.

Suddenly a servant arrives and says to Job: "Your herds of oxen, camels and asses have just been stolen by the Sabellians and the Chaldeans, who killed all your servants.

I only escaped to come and tell you the news."

The latter was still speaking, when another servant presents himself:

"Lord, exclaim, the lightning has struck down all your sheep and those who feed them. I was the only one excepted, to come and tell you the news."

As soon as he had finished speaking, the third one came up and said to Job:

"While all your children were gathered together in the house of their eldest brother, a horn of wind arose on the side of the desert, which brought down the house and left your children and your servants crushed beneath the ruins. I only managed to escape, to come and tell you the news."

Here is the devil, as has been said before, using the elements of nature, of human perversity, to do harm, to destroy and devastate. The wicked, whatever they may be, are either guilty co-workers or blind instruments of Satan. For those who only see things through the branches, there is only a robbery and robbers here, a storm, the fire of heaven, one of those storms of wind and sand, which even today devastates the deserts of Africa and Arabia. For those who penetrate to the core, there is the influx of the devil.

The devil wanted Job to blaspheme; but this great servant of God is a man of faith and hope. The violence of pain does not rob you of your calm. He prostrates himself face down, worships God; humbly submit to the divine will. "Naked I came from my mother's bosom, he exclaims; naked I will enter it.

The Lord gave, the Lord took away. Blessed be his holy name!"

See how Job's faith clearly highlights the hand of God under the evil influence of the devil and creatures, and how faithfully he kisses the hand that wounds him. He knows, he sees that it is the father's hand. , who only sends suffering to his children to refine them.

Defeated in the first assault, the devil does not give up, He insists:

"—Stretch out your hand upon him, I said unto the Lord; Trample his body, and we will see if he does not come to curse you.

"—Very well, I give it to you, answered the Lord; but I forbid you to try against his life."

And soon the wretched Job has his body covered with ulcers; from head to toe it was a living wound.

Out of aid, he reached the extreme of going to lie down on a very filthy mule. Friends abandoned him; and even the woman herself, throwing chufas at him, went away, saying:

"—Curse God and die!" But he, always faithful, replied mildly: "Out of the hand of God we receive benefits and prosperity; why should we not accept evils also?" And his deep faith, his patience and hopeful resignation remained unshakable.

The Holy Scripture adds that the trial lasted for long years, and that at last the Lord rewarded the fidelity of his servant by a hundredfold, filling him again, and until the end of his life, with all the qualities of benefits.

When we suffer, in body, heart or fortune, let us imitate Job! let us bless the Lord; let us know how to lure him through the ordeal; let us be men of faith and prayer; let us not only see the immediate cause of our sufferings; let us give to God what is due to God: worship, perfect submission, thanksgiving, trust, love; and to the devil, what is due to the devil; contempt of their deceit and horror of their perversity.

V

WHAT IS THE TRUE CONSOLER OF OUR SUFFERING?

He is the one who said and could only say to the world:

"Come unto me, all ye that suffer and are bent under weights; and I will give you rest." It is the human Son of God; it is the great Savior, the great victim, Jesus Christ.

This was one of his first words when he began to manifest himself to the world. In the synagogue of Nazareth, holding the book of Isaiah's prophecies in his hand, he opened it and read aloud the following passage: "The Spirit of the Lord rests upon me. He sent me to evangelize the poor, to heal the afflicted hearts, to announce freedom to the captives, to restore light to the blind. And looking at all the people, he added:

"These words are fulfilled today before you."

Jesus Christ, in fact, finds in the treasures of his grace with which to supply all our sufferings, without exception, as a remedy. It does not exempt us from them; because, as sinners that we are, the sufferings and the atonement are due to us; but, by a divine secret, it metamorphoses and transfigures our pains, converting their pain into wonderful softness.

To bring about this transformation, He, the Son of God, the Innocent, the Holy of Holies, who in no way deserved to suffer, wanted to immediately assume the terrible weight of all our pains. Nothing omitted his merciful love: sufferings of the soul, heart, body, all kinds of hardships, poverty, humiliation, slander, persecutions, betrayals, insults, atrocious affronts, injustices, stinging pains, helplessness: he suffered everything, he wanted everything suffer.

After this, he has the right to say to us, to cry out to us from the height of his cross, where he suffers and dies for us: "Come to me, all you who suffer!"

And Jesus is our God, our eternal creator; He is both our model of suffering and our eternal reward. It is the life of our souls; it is in us; if we resolve to belong to him and love him, he remains, through his grace, in the depths of our hearts.

"If anyone loves me, tell us all, my Father and I will love him and we will come to him and make our home in him. Abide in me and I in you."

Oh! what a comforter! Another one we don't have. Just as only God is God, so only Jesus is Jesus, which means Savior, comforter, support, doctor and medicine.

Is disease, a wound, any infirmity afflicting us? Let's look at Jesus crucified and flowing with blood.

Do persecution and slander invest us? Do injustice, evil and human ferocity make us suffer? Let's look at the Cross; let us contemplate Jesus persecuted and condemned to death.

Are we humiliated, betrayed, doomed to abandonment?

Let's look at the cross; for the nativity scene; for Jesus, always for Jesus, heavenly Comforter, Innocent victim.

All the anxieties, all the tortures of unrequited love, his Sacred Heart suffered. He who loved so much, He, Immeasurable Love, was hated, repelled by all. What suffering! and what heart will ever bear the hundred millionth part of Him?

Jesus Christ had his body macerated, torn apart. In short, everything suffered; only to eliminate sin, the cause of our sufferings; to sanctify, to deify our pains by joining them to yours; to comfort us in our trials; to save us.

Saviour, comforter: this is what Jesus Christ is in the midst of human pain. Let us unite with Him if we want to be comforted.

VI

FROM THE BEAUTIFUL BOOK IN WHICH ALL THOSE WHO SUFFER SHOULD KNOW HOW TO READ

A great saint, who lived in Italy in the 13th century, and who founded the order of the Servants of Mary, St. Philip of Beniti, had reached the end of his laborious career.

Lying on the boards that served as his bed, almost in agony, he was surrounded by his brothers, who assisted him in this supreme struggle.

"Give me my book," murmured the dying man. Assuming that he wanted to recite a psalm, one of the confreres hastily offers him his book of Hours, but St. Philip hints that this is not what he wants and gently repeats: Give me my book; give me my book." Another confrere presents the Sacred Scripture to him. "No, the blessed dying person still helps; no... give me my book."

There were those who, impressed by this insistence, noticed that St. Philip did not take his eyes off a crucifix hanging near his bed. The latter, like a radiant face, then stretches out his limp hands, takes the sacred image of his God, and dangling it with transport, exclaims: "Behold, here is my book!... This is my dear book; during mine All my life, I took it to heart to learn to read it... It's the only book in which it's necessary to know how to read!" And over the crucifix he exhaled, a few moments later, his last breath.

The Crucifix: Yes, here is the great book of the afflicted ones, which they must consult, read, meditate incessantly.

An unfortunate, a sick man without a crucifix is like the soldier without weapons, the officer without tools.

The unfortunate Maria Stuart had her crucifix in her hand, and she often waved it as they led her to the scaffold. "Lady, a Protestant officer who accompanied her brutally observed to her, it is not in the hands but in the heart that it is important to bring the Christ. certainty in the heart." Admirable answer! Yes, let us have the crucifix in our hands, in front of our eyes, on our chests, so that we may remember the loving Savior who lives in our soul, and who suffered so much to sanctify and make our sufferings fruitful.

In fact, what does it teach us, what resembles the crucifix?

At first sight and above all else, that God loved us so much, that he deigned to become man for our sakes and to redeem us at the cost of his blood.

Remind us, teach us, that we are disciples of a crucified Master, cut with stripes, bathed in blood, humiliated, beaten down, abandoned by all, persecuted, obedient to the point of death. What a teaching this for a miserable afflicted one! what an irresistible example!

What do the wounds of the crucifix tell us? Those of the sacred feet of Jesus let these two great words reach our hearts, wrapped in divine blood: Penance and Obedience. Hands: Poverty and Chastity. The wound on the side: Love, Sacrifice. The wounds of the head crowned with thorns cry out: humility. In short, the wounds that cover everything on his body are many other voices that repeat to us: Mortification, Patience, Resignation, Meekness, Love of suffering, Hope.

Such is the summary of the great book of Christians; a book that they must learn to read from childhood, that they must always read and meditate, and especially when, immolated by suffering, they find themselves called by Jesus Christ to suffer with Him, to suffer for Him, to suffer as He and in Him.

It is unforgivable for a Christian not to have a crucifix. The crucifix is the weapon of life and death; it is the sum of the Gospel; it is the book of consolation and salvation. It is everyone's book, a divine book that everyone can read, understand, appreciate. The last of the poor, the last of the ignorant, if they know and love God, can read and understand this book admirably; and the greatest of sages can absolutely not understand it if he does not know and love Jesus Christ.

O you all who suffer, learn, I most earnestly pray, learn to read and understand the crucifix!

VII

ON HOW JESUS CHRIST COMES TO US AND COMFORTS US THROUGH HIS CHURCH

As well as transmitting to us the light of faith, Jesus Christ of his Church is used; so too, through her, she communicates admirable consolations to us.

Sent by Jesus Christ, the Church is the great consoler of human suffering.

It matters that we throw ourselves into her loving lap if we are to find the balm of consolations.

To go no further, here is a consolation: the treasures of true faith, which give us absolute certainty of the soft and consoling truths of Religion.

The Church and faith teach us infallibly that if we suffer holy in this world, we will have magnificent and eternal happiness in heaven, and that all our transitory tribulations are worth little compared to the height of eternal glory that the Church prepares for us in the Paradise. The Church and the faith unveil the mystery of suffering, and soon everything changes its aspect: what

was horrible becomes tolerable and even appetizing; the love of Jesus Christ transmutes thorns into roses, the taste of sweetness.

The Church comforts us, teaching us to pray, to strengthen union with our Savior; and to draw from Him, as from an inexhaustible fountain, the refreshing water of consolation and peace.

The Church comforts us, making us handle the Holy Gospels, and teaching us to taste the manna hidden in the words and actions of Jesus Christ.

In fact, like the crucifix, so the Gospel is the book of divine consolations.

The Church consoles us by doing even more: she gives us Jesus Christ himself, yes, Jesus present and veiled in the Eucharist. Comfort us by giving us the Comforter in person. In fact, the Church continually possesses Jesus, who is with us, and, for our sakes, daily descends to the altar in the hands of the Priest; the Church, through her ministers, gives Jesus Christ to those who ask Him.

The Church also consoles us with all the actions that her priests carry out for our happiness: through them she makes us hear, in times of tribulation and tears, words that come from heaven and that lead there, Through them, she already forgives us our sins and restores our peace of heart and the joys of conscience, already showers us with benefits, reviving our hope, encouraging our courage, alleviating our misfortunes, without exception .

Finally, in the supreme trance of death, the Church and the Church alone can only and, as gently as effectively, give us charitable consolation. "Sir, I said to the charitable priest who was watching him, a man of high rank, who had hitherto been indifferent to religion, sir, I warmly thank you for having been an instrument of divine mercies toward me. If I die in peace, trusting in divine goodness , to your intervention I owe it."

During the Prussian siege of Paris, a volunteer, a junior officer, a member of a wealthy and noble family, had been mortally wounded on the plains of Bougival. Waiting for the moment to appear before God, he lay on his back, with his hands together, swimming in blood and riddled with wounds. Providence wanted an army chaplain close by, who responded to the groans of the poor wounded.

"My Father," said the latter, after having declared his name and the residence of his family, I went to confession yesterday; I die in a state of grace. Tell my family that I die contentedly; because I am a Christian and have done my duty. I turned my face to the enemy.

There are eleven bullets in my body. Comfort my mother. Birth to have the God of mercies "and fell asleep in the Lord.. And the Church, the priest 's hands, closed her eyes

Such is the beneficent mission of the Church. To

separate from the Church, instill us ego, hatred , or at least forgetting it, is the devil's customary trait.The wretched man longs to crash us into despair, just as he crashed us into sin and the punishment of sin, which is suffering.

He wants to disinherit us from the love of the Church, because he knows well that Jesus Christ is in the Church, just as life is in the living and fire is in the coals. And he doesn't want Jesus Christ to save us, unite with us, sanctify and comfort us. It is the great enemy of Him and ours; it is important that we do not listen, and with respect, tenderness and trust, we seek the maternal bosom of the Church.

She is the comforter of the guilt-ridden world.

VIII

OF THE AMAZING DEDICATIONS WHICH FOR THE CONSOLATION OF THOSE SUFFERING THE CHURCH HAS RAISED

We owe everything to the Church. From childhood we are fond of sunlight and the wonders of creation, we enjoy them unnoticed. This is how it happens in relation to the Church and its benefits: we have for starters what defies the admiration and deepest gratitude of those who convert early; we enjoy with sovereign indifference the marvelous dedications everywhere brought about by Catholic charity.

Dedicating oneself to strangers, who almost always pay the benefit received with repulsion and insults, serving the poor, most often ungrateful and liars, foolish children, scorns, buckets of recognition, intolerable pile up of all contagions; living together, in hospitals, prisons, in asylums for the insane, with beings so often debased, and always repugnant; to give hand to rooms and pleasures, often even to the homeland and the family, which is most cherished, only to give up in dedication to all these wretches, and that without waiting for any retribution or income: such dedication, who inspired it? who, day by day, continues to inspire it to millions of priests, men and women religious, lay people of both sexes? Who? Jesus Christ alone, who lives in his Church and wants through her to save and console the world.

The comforting works that faith has produced flood the five parts of the world. Sisters of Charity are everywhere. Both in China and in France, they unveil themselves at the bedside of the sick and take care of destitute orphans; and no one calculates how many heroic sacrifices are hidden under the cap of the daughter of St. Vincent de Paul and under the humble veil of the nun. Many righteous ladies are distinguished by birth; many could have contracted advantageous links; but not; all of this they disdained, avoided the tenderness and tears of their own, to come, in a hospital, close to a bed of pain, exposed to the danger of contagion, to watch at the bedside of an ungrateful person, perhaps a soulless one, who chastised them. I met a Sister of Charity in Paris who, for over thirty years, had been working day and night for more than fifty sick people, entrusted to her maternal solicitude; neither an impatience nor a complaint could be reproached him; modesty, goodness and joy always shone on that face. One would say that she was the smallest of the maids, modestly exercising the duties of her profession like any nurse; however, she was one of the noblest and most opulent, representatives of an ancient family of Tolosa; and her admirable virtue, which was based on humility and charity, had impelled her to obtain from the superiors the grace, which she had in high regard, of never going beyond being a simple hospital nurse. however, she was one of the noblest and most

opulent, representatives of an ancient family of Tolosa; and her admirable virtue, which was based on humility and charity, had impelled her to obtain from the superiors the grace, which she had in high regard, of never being more than a simple hospital nurse. However, she was one of the noblest and most opulent, representatives of an ancient family of Tolosa; and her admirable virtue, which was based on humility and charity, had impelled her to obtain from the superiors the grace, which she had in high regard, of never going beyond being a simple hospital nurse.

Marvels of this carat abound in Catholic hospitals, schools and convents. Perhaps you know who the modest Sister of Charity is who climbs the steps of the attic waters, or who educates the child of the poor in schools; the other, who elbows in the street, and who walks muddy, drenched in the rain, wrinkled with cold, or else exhausted with fatigue and sweat by the rays of a blazing sun; that humble Sister of Charity, who tends to nauseating wounds, and, as a servant, performs the smallest and most disgusting mysteries; do you know who is? Two or three years ago, perhaps, I passed near you on a sumptuous train; she was rich, she was courted, here she is today kneeling beside a hospital cot, doing well, distributing consolations and medicine. It's beautiful, it's great, isn't it? And there will be people there who can haggle at the Catholic Church, which inspires such wonders, the gratitude of the disinherited of fortune?

And all that is said is adapted with perfect application to Catholic religious, who also devote themselves, and in a thousand different ways, to the relief of all miseries, both physical and moral. One cannot even believe what kind of hearts beat most often under the humble bunting of the Franciscan, the Hospitaller Brother of St. John of God, the Brother of the Christian Schools, etc. There, too, charity hid and ignored more than one illustrious name from men.

There is even today in France a poor religious man, who goes barefoot, and whose family has more than sixty thousand pounds of income and lives in a splendid palace; another, former diplomat and high social hierarchy, who is the lord of a name known throughout the world; another, who was the most prosperous lawyer in his province, etc., etc. Why did they leave everything? Why did they voluntarily dismount from the social heights, where all the good fortune beckoned to them? Do you know, reader, why?

Because Jesus Christ and his Church showed them your tears, your miseries, your abandonment. And now they are, that we may say so, at your feet; they have been reduced to the condition of your brothers, friends, servants and comforters; and, again and again, they have also reduced themselves (it is hard to say!) to the position of your victims.

The life they embraced to do you good is all self-denial and incessant sacrifice; and just as the tree that produces the incense, when cut, it distils, in the form of tears, the fragrant resin; so too, from the profound dedications of the priest, of the religious, which the Church arouses along with weakness and suffering, springs the comforting balm that perfumes this world so full of miseries

. of the taleless works suggested by the mercy of the Church. Today, perhaps more than ever before, they abound in every corner of the earth, for the salvation not only of the poor, but also of the rich; because the Church

saves the rich through the poor, while assisting and comforting the poor through the rich.

Oh! good and holy Church of Jesus Christ! Those who seek to snatch from you the respects and sympathies of the poor, the child, the worker, the sick, the afflicted, in short, from all who suffer in this world, commit an abominable crime against humanity. They are not only enemies of God, but also of men; more delinquents, more devious than the murderers who steal and kill, they murder souls, and rob the wretched of their only treasure: consolation!

IX

ON HOW RELIGION HELPS TO ENDURE BODILY DISEASES AND SUFFERING

In diseases and bodily infirmities, the consoling omnipotence of Religion stands out more clearly. Doctors themselves often recognize its almost miraculous effects.

If there are unworthy doctors who, out of prejudice and dominated by stupid and gross impiety, drive the priest away from the sick person's bedside, on the pretext of sparing "emotions" for him, there are others, and many, who, at the same time, are more intelligent and more charitable. , effectively take advantage of the beneficial influence of Religion: in fact, the serenity of conscience, the hope and peace inseparable from prayer, confession, and especially communion, constitute, there is no denying it, excellent conditions that predispose to healing .

Calm spirit, resignation, patience, complete docility to medical precepts: these are the things the patient needs most. And where will he go to look for all this, if not in the treasures of peace and true strength, which thrive only in the shadow of Religion? Ah! what a great physician the Catholic priest is!

Religious help, it is true, does not eliminate the sufferings; confession, which takes away sins, does not even take away fever, and communion, which unites the soul to God, does not aim to miraculously cure the body; but, by virtue of the intimate union of body and soul, and also, strength is to proclaim it, by virtue of the divine, supernatural influence that Our Lord has often pleased to exert over his servants, the good of the soul reverberates in the body, and divine medicine reacts on medicine. Awareness in jolts to health is harmful. There is no sleeping conscience that does not awaken, however little, the sufferings and fear of death. If this conscience is clouded, how will the patient's heart not be? Full of anxiety, if not remorse. Now, no one will say that such conditions are conducive to the usefulness of medicines.

Miserly sick! do you suffer? You must listen to what the Church says to you from God, through the lips of the priest, the nun, the pious friend who, moved and filled with pity, is near your bed. It speaks to you of heaven, of heaven where one no longer suffers, and where it leads the suffering Christianly endured to. It reminds us of the need for penance and the maximum benefit to be reaped from suffering: whatever they may be, they are no more atrocious than the terrible fire of Purgatory. It speaks to you of the Savior; it urges you to union with Him through communion, in order to

strengthen you in combat. One day I was visiting the Charity Hospital in Paris, an unfortunate patient who was very ill, prostrate from a long illness. He hesitated for some time about confessing and taking communion; yet the necessity of God in such a way imposed on him, that the miser finally did what he should have started with. "Well then, my friend said to him, how have you been since the morning? God has given you a marked grace, hasn't he?—Oh! yes sir," he replied, panting and with an unspeakable expression on his face; oh! yes, now I'm all right. ; now not alone, we are two to suffer!"

For the sick, the first friend, the first doctor is the priest. It is necessary to call him straight away and not be afraid of him. It is the Jesus of the sick, that is, their comforter and savior. Benfazejo ambassador of God, he is only the bearer of graces and blessings.

When grappling with illness, there is something admirable about true Christians. Many of them really defy the awe of serenity and joyful resignation! A holy woman, blind for many years, was in a bed of pain, due to illness, which she knew was incurable. Do you suffer a lot? they asked him once. "Yes, very much," replied the patient serenely. There are times when I believe I will lose patience; so I hug my crucifix; I invoke the Blessed Virgin and with her assistance I manage to remain silent."

The infamous Dupuytren, who despite being kind was rough and rude in his expression, had taken in a poor old man, parish priest of a rural parish, in his large general hospital (Hotel Dieu), on whom he had to practice a painful operation. "Are you cheerful? was the question he addressed to the miserable priest. The operation will be long and stormy. "God will give me courage," replied the patient mildly. I am at your service." And Dupuytren began the work, cutting and shredding the operator's meat for more than a quarter of an hour, so as to horrify the assistants themselves; blood ran in spurts. Only a few convulsions, a few involuntary, choked moans indicated that the patient was not made of a stick. Dupuytren was taken aback. — 'Well, I told him, you have no nerves! Are you as insensitive as a stump?' The unhappy priest, exhausted with pain, still had the strength to smile; and for the only answer he showed her the crucifix, which he convulsively clutched, "It's amazing!" the expert surgeon told the assistants. And suddenly, changing his tone and manner, he asked the patient affectionately, leaning towards him: "I caused you a lot of suffering, didn't I?"

"Oh, not as many as my God has suffered for my sake," murmured the patient. And Dupuytren withdrew, repeating to his disciples, Admirable! I have never seen such courage."

After a few weeks, the virtuous parish priest was discharged from the hospital and returned to his parish, which was delighted to see him again. Dupuytren had given him assiduous and gentle care. Your kindness has been rewarded. Every year, on the anniversary of the famous operation, he would see the old parish priest arrive at his house, with a feeling of affection, who carried a small gourd containing the best fruits of his orchard. He consecrated true affection to the worthy priest; and when he was about to die, he sent for him, and wanted him to administer to him the last aids of religion. He died a Christian in his arms, and it may well be that the celebrated surgeon's last breath was exhaled on that same crucifix which had figured in the above-mentioned operation.

It would be endless to expose similar stories, which show how effectively Religion helps the sick to suffer courageously.

x

OF HOW OUR LORD DIGES HIMSELF AT TIMES TO AWARD WITH EXTRAORDINARY FAVORS THE FAITH OF THE SICK OF HIS PREDILECTION

God, in addition to dispensing with the consolations mentioned above, sometimes deigns, and more often than one imagines, to reward the piety of the sick with extraordinary graces. These are not miracles strictly speaking; but, from what it is very similar to; what is certain is that those who receive such graces feel such intense joy and consolation, as if a true miracle had been dispensed to them.

There is no priest or nun who, twenty, a hundred times in his life, has not had to witness such tender manifestations of divine mercy.

I will mention some of which I witnessed in order to encourage the readers' faith.

In 1860 one of my friends, as fervent Christian as a distinguished magistrate, asked me to see one of his twelve-year-old sons, who had been bedridden for many weeks and was now burning with a devouring fever. "Flash of pain, the loving father told me: the two best doctors in Paris have just declared the disease incurable. The poor child has tubercles in his intestines, which are already ulcerated; resignation is the only remedy. Come help my son to die. The outcome, it seems, will not be long; I would have liked him to take his first communion before he died."

In a hurry, I went to the sickly trembling, whose thinness and weakness were excessive. Fortunately, the degree of his religious education allowed me to prepare him sufficiently within 3 or 4 days: in such cases, God mainly attends to the heart. Thus, I was able to administer Holy Communion as a viaticum to the pious child. He received Our Lord with angelic simplicity and fervor. Around the bed, her entire family was on her knees.

An admirable thing and quite inexplicable! the fever had declined: he had fled before the Eucharist.

The doctor arrives the next day; an excellent man, very close to the family, but not at all Christian.

Check for disappearance of fever; does not come up with the explanation of the fact. Return the next day: no fever, no more pain either. "We must take advantage of this state, he observed to the family, and employ decisive applications." The mother tried to resist. "It was God who healed him, he said; let us give everything to God." The doctor insists; the father does not dare take responsibility for the resistance, and the sick man has taken the prescribed potion. That was a drag, behold, the fever returns with all intensity."

"—You had no faith," — full of consternation, the mother says to her husband.

This one, to whom faith was not lacking, comes to tell me of his affliction. "For the medicine is still there, I cut short. Let us have confidence in Our Lord, Pray all a lot; and tomorrow again I will take Holy Communion to our sick man."

And the next day, after communion, the fever deserted for the second time.

From that moment on, France began and convalescence continued uninterrupted; it was long, but it was consoled and consolidated every week by the visit of the Blessed God. The child has today become an excellent and dignified boy, vigorously healthy, fervently pious, and endowed with admirable candor. At the siege of Paris he fought like a lion against the Prussians.

No less extraordinary consolation was bestowed, in May, 1869, on a pious maiden who had been absolutely disillusioned by the doctors.

Such a rare internal illness did she suffer from that the doctor, director of the hospital to which she had been transported, invited two other great clinicians to come and observe a case which, he said, he had not yet found a second in his already long medical career. The unfortunate Maria (the sick woman was called) was in excruciating pain; but faith and deep piety managed to subdue evil; and, except during crises, when he was completely beside himself, his courage and perfect resignation to everyone edified. Many very painful operations suffered, without the slightest result.

The doctor declared her irrevocably lost. Certain tranquilizers, which did not soothe her, were already the only remedies she took.

One fine day, as if by a kind of inspiration, it occurred to her to consecrate herself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and make, in its honor, if God would deign to heal her, two vows: vow of perpetual chastity and of professing as a Religious Nurse, spoke to me about it; I told him that, accepting the inspiration, he should take both vows, and take Communion the next day.

Hours after communion, I went to visit her. "Oh! my priest, he exclaimed, what happiness! what a grace! Since I took my vows, I have hardly suffered anymore. The doctor has just paid his visit; my animated face made him fall from the clouds, and he cannot help but to ask the nurse: "What was that?" I, who knew it well, wanted to laugh.

In fact, five or six days later, the good Maria began to get up; and, after a month, he can return to his mother's house and help her prepare her little novice's trousseau. She took the veil for Christmas, and today, with a dedication equal to her perfect health, she unveils herself for the patients in one of the hospital wards called Hotel Dieu.

I repeat: these effects of the sacraments on the sick, although extraordinary, are less rare than is believed; and if the vast field of disease is inflamed with many sufferings and many tears, it is also exquisitely glazed by those half-miracles, which resemble the thousand flowers that color the meadows in spring. Anyone who took the trouble to collect the most salient of these facts would come to compose a rather voluminous book.

It is that Jesus is the God, the Savior of the sick; shakes them; and if it doesn't always cure their bodies, it weaves them very special thanks to the ordeal to which it temporarily subjects them.

XI

ON HOW LIVING FAITH COMES TO INSPIRING THE LOVE OF SUFFERING

If, even with very pious people, the half-miracles already mentioned are relatively scarce, they give much more frequently, and through the love of sufferings, a clear witness to the consoling efficacy of faith.

Things considered in a purely natural light, man has an ingrained and legitimate aversion to suffering, true evil, disorder for which he was not created, and, moreover, punishment and the result of the power of the devil; therefore, the horror of illnesses and ailments is more than very much in keeping with human nature.

However, faced in the supernatural light, suffering changes its aspect; and when the faith, living and profound, is nourished by fervent prayer and the holy attendance of the sacraments, it reaches the extreme of making the Christian not only bear with patience, but also love suffering.

That is why we read in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, that the great Saint being very much tormented by some illness, one of his confreres, who was still a young man, who was assisting him, ventured this observation: "Ah! Father, you suffer too much. Why don't you pray to God to deliver you from this torment?" Then St. Francis, sitting on his bed, and, halfway indignant and compassionate, looking at the mean religious man, exclaimed: "What say you my brother? Do you lack faith? If this lapse were not the child of the simplicity and goodness of your heart, I would not forgive you. My beloved Jesus, for my sake, suffered: is it not fair that I want to suffer and suffer with him? through these pains, give me greater penance."

In Paris I met a holy man who, after living in the world, had sincerely turned to God.

In fact, his fervor was extraordinary, his joy constant and contagious. Suffered continuous gout attacks; however, the more he suffered, the happier he became.

"Very well, I repeated; very well! This evidently proves that God does not forget me. There is nothing better than to suffer like Our Lord and with Him." I had the good fortune to visit him on his deathbed, and when he had already entered the agony; it seemed to me that he was suffering horribly. Kneeling by the bed, I asked him, "How are you, my friend?"—Perfectly, he answered me with a meaningful tone: Very well, everything is very well!—So, do you suffer a lot?—Yes, yes; that's what I want."

Hours later he expired, ablaze with the same fervor and the same ardent love as Jesus Christ crucified.

I also met another servant of God, of the order of St. Dominic, who had been a missionary, bishop, and later archbishop. , in Paris, at the convent of Dominican Religious. It extended patience to the brink of heroism. His agony

lasted entire weeks. Lying on his back, motionless, his legs and body disproportionately swollen, his kidneys gangrenous, he exhaled and breathed putrid miasmas, which did little to aggravate his ailments. Not a complaint was heard from him; even more—he would not even allow anyone to take pity on him. After the bouts of illness, he would murmur: "It was nothing; let's not talk about it any more"; and contemplated the crucifix. Seeing the consternation of his friends, when he had already lost the use of speech, he looked at them serenely, and with a reproachful expression, putting his finger to his lips to inculcate in them, by this gesture, not to regret him.

That is how Monsignor Amantou, with his soul bathed in superhuman peace and perfectly resigned, flew to the bosom of God, on October 12, 1869.

The admirable vow made by Father Luiz Dupont, famous religious of the Society of Jesus, also shows what the Christian soul is, subjected to the ordeal of suffering. Many years before he died, this priest was purified in the crucible of illness. Having once felt sorry for him with some vivacity, the little edification produced on the confreres who assisted him as nurses did not go unnoticed: distressed, raising simple fragility to the category of crime, he lay down under the bed, humbly asking forgiveness of Ours Lord and the brethren, and, in a loud voice, vowed never to complain about anything again until he breathed his last breath. With heroic fidelity he fulfilled his vow, all suffering in absolute silence.

The heroisms of faith are of this kind. And, we must repeat them to the full, in all social hierarchies, in all ages, in all regions, the heroes of suffering and Christian resignation abound by the thousands.

Day by day, piety and illness engender this consoling marvel, superior to all cherishing.

XII

THE HARD TRIAL OF DISEASES

Illnesses and illnesses differ: they are more or less transitory; it has a certain permanence stamp. Illness is ordinarily less painful than illness; but it is almost always much more painful and difficult to be endured, given its continuity character. In the ordeal of illness, impatience is more to be feared; in the case of illness, despondency, sadness, just like routine, which consists in carrying the cross in a trivial way, without prayer, without any effort at sanctification, becomes the most fearful danger.

The variety of illnesses is infinite. Just as it is difficult to choose among many pieces of velvet of different colors, each one more beautiful, so, among the thousand varieties of diseases, it is not known which one takes the primacy of being unpleasant. The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the paralyzed and so many others, which it doesn't matter now to mention, are all unfortunate sick people who inspire pity.

Illness, whatever it may be, is painful in itself, very painful; and many times it becomes even more painful, because the sick person at all times compares himself with those who do not suffer the same illness as him, because of the thousand accidents, somewhat ridiculous and unavoidable,

whenever we do not see, we do not hear, we stammer, or we have a problem; in short, whenever we are sick.

The sick should have great meekness together with true humility. Of such virtues, St. Francis de Sales is a beautiful model. He was almost obese, despite incessant work. The Calvinists, who deeply disliked him, nicknamed him "Santo Gordo." On one of his pastoral excursions, he was at the window one afternoon with some Catholic noblemen, in the house of one of them. Passing along the street a Huguenot student, a boy aged 17 to 18, saw the holy bishop and insolently apostrophised him: "Santo Gordo! Santo Gordo!"

The kind bishop only smiled; but the nobles took the mockery seriously, and two of them, following the insolent man, immediately seized him by the collar and brought him to the presence of St. Francis de Sales.

He asked the onlookers to leave him alone for a few moments with the delinquent. After everyone had left, he made him sit down beside him, he excused his fault, and with such kindness and such attractive charity he spoke to the wretched fool that he, most ensnared, could not avoid crying and ask for forgiveness on your knees. The Saint lifted him up and embraced him tenderly; and such a profound impression made such a welcome upon the young Protestant, who, a short time later, converted to Catholicism. "It is evidently true, he said, the religion which leads to such things and such men produce."

There is no state that gives so much opportunity to deserving as that of illness. It is uninterrupted deprivation; and even when the illness is not painful, there is always a forced situation of renunciation of one's own will, of mortification, of penance, as long as the sick person resigns to it in a very trivial way, so that he deserves much before God.

If such a situation is accepted with living faith and true love, it is evident how sanctifying and easily sanctifying illness becomes. Yes, easily; for suffice it to say with all truth—Amen, and gladly accept unavoidable evils.

This explains why very fervent souls crave illness and welcome it as a friend when it presents itself.

At the Seminary of S. Sulpicio I met a saintly director, who was in terms of losing his sight. "It is, he told me, great grace and great benefit that Our Lord does to me. I only hope that it will not remain in that; it is that after I become blind, I will also become deaf. How good it would be if I could not distract my soul from the love of my God!" And the holy man smiled gently. The plea was not granted: he regained his sight and never failed to hear perfectly. But this was not the less meritorious in God's eyes of the good desire manifested.

Although they cannot raise: if the so sublime virtue, the sick must, through prayer and meekness, seek to sanctify their daily sacrifice and be solicitous not to leave the state of grace: without this state they would be lost to heaven the most precious merits of infirmity, which, whatever it may be, is great grace; and the greater grace, the more grievous the infirmity. It is important to have this always present, and not to cry out against God when it is only necessary to bless him; it is illness like a chariot that, despite the uncomfortable game and the unpleasant bumps, transports straight to the

sky. The penance that the sick person would not have the courage to impose himself, she forces him to do, thus preparing him for a magnificent seat in Paradise.

Sickness is a thick splinter of the true cross: venerate it, sick people, and cherish it in proportion to its worth. Do not rejoice over his disappearance.

They say that St. Omer, Bishop of Arras, in the last years of his life had gone blind. Despite his blindness, he continued to carry out the functions of his office. Presiding one day over the transfer of the relics of I don't know what martyr, whose reliquary he carried along with another bishop, he suddenly regains his sight. There are many who in such circumstances would exult; but he, who saw things by the clarity of faith, began to weep and complain to God and to the martyr; and he was so successful in doing it that, at the end of the ceremony, he obtained a sudden restitution of his cherished infirmity.

Oh! if all the sick were animated by such a spirit, how many saints would flourish in the great garden of the Church!

XIII

HOW AMONG ABUSE IS POSSIBLE TO SANCTIFICATION

It was the ill-treatment, suffered in a fortunately rare height, that elevated the humble shepherdess of Pibrac, St. Germana Gousin, canonized by Pius IX, on June 29, 1867, to such complete sanctity. He had married a second marriage to an impertinent and wicked woman, who had a great dislike, for no apparent reason, for the miserable stepdaughter, who was then fourteen years old. He treated her harshly, beat her, molested her in every way for eight consecutive years, Hard crusts of black bread, which the miserable child often moistened with tears and diluted in the water of a stream, were the only food that gave him. I even wanted to kick her out of the house permanently; but the father, weaker than perverse, managed to obtain for his unfortunate daughter permission to sleep on branches, in a kind of angle formed by a stairwell.

The child, at once unhappy and blissful, never complained; to anger he opposed meekness; to beatings, prayer and silence. He always prayed and received Communion with the greatest frequency and tremblingly loved the Blessed Virgin, whom he considered to be the only true mother to whom he told all his sorrows. She resorted to her protection whenever her stepmother made her suffer the most.

Grated by grief and deprivation, Germana died holy at the age of 22, having silently swallowed the anguish of her life. Forty years later, God wanted to show the glory and holiness of his servant; he found himself one fine day, on the surface of the earth, in the place where she had been buried, her coffin and her corpse in a state of perfect repair; the flowers, placed in the coffin according to the usages of the place, were as fresh as if they had been freshly picked.

Great miracles accompanied and followed this one; and St. Germana's body was honorably deposited in a beautiful reliquary, where, until the French

Revolution, it was preserved whole, with its flexible and malleable limbs, its flesh. mom. Here's the best concept he's been able to pull off rosy pains and as if they were alive.

In this world of misery, there is nothing more general than mistreatment: mistreatment of masters towards servants and workers; from husbands to wives, or from fathers to children; mistreatment of the strong towards the weak, the superior towards the inferior; from bosses to subordinates, etc; it all boils down to criminal abuse of force and authority. And, in turn, such abuse is the expression of the pride that so often accompanies strength in all positions. If man must always be meek and humble of heart, the obligation to be so rises, whenever he governs and practices with those who are inferior to him.

The pride, the harsh manners, there is no one to swallow them without much cost. Being mistreated, and mistreated in public and repeatedly, exasperates anyone; and the more legitimate the indignation, the more difficult it is to contain it.

In such emergencies, it is important for man to put on a great deal of courage and keep silent. Silence is a wonderful aid to patience and resignation. Okay, this is not an easy thing; it's even very difficult; but the more meritorious and say that of Christians it will be, the more difficult it is. Here's what Jesus did: in the Garden of Olives they insult him, tie him up, beat him up; and he remits himself to silence.

Before the high priests, they spat in his face, slapped him: and he was always silent. In front of Herod, chufas say to him, they treat him crazy; they throw on his shoulders, in derision, the tunic that madmen used to wear and force him to wield a reed scepter: Jesus, says the Gospel, does not answer a single word. In front of Pilate he is silent in the same way; which, the Gospel further says, "astounded Pilate."

Absolute silence; silence accompanied by interior union with Jesus, outraged and tormented: what a great and effective recipe to be able to bear the harsh ordeal of mistreatment in a Christian way!

God has more than once rewarded her with miracles. One day, when St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, was walking in his own mind and preceded by his clerics and relatives, he was met by a group of pagan soldiers traveling in the opposite direction, in a large carriage, along the same road.

Perhaps St. Martin having frightened the horses, the soldiers became enraged and attacked him, beat him, mistreated him and left him, almost fainting, lying on the ground. S. Martinho hadn't even opened his mouth. The relatives, noticing the saint's delay, backed off and found him in such a pitiful state. But at the same time they had to witness an extraordinary spectacle: the soldiers, once again installed in the carriage, were making vain efforts to get the horses to continue their journey; screams, whips, everything was useless; horses could not move. Frightened by such an obvious prodigy, they dismounted, and, changing their attitude, asked the relatives of their victim, what man was he, who was thus failing vigorous horses on the ground. They believed themselves lost when they learned that it was Bishop Martin, so famous in Gaul, and promptly asked for his forgiveness, St. Martin, reassured, told them that he forgave them for the love of Jesus Christ and urged them to convert to the true faith.

Then, making the sign of the cross on the motionless pair, he allowed it to proceed. The astonished soldiers re-entered the carriage and immediately the horses galloped away.

But if resignation to abuse is not always accompanied by miracles, exceptional blessings and graces are never lacking. I knew a holy girl, whose cruelties, the truly incredible malice, the offensive sayings of an old sick mother, advanced more on the path of sanctity than the most austere monastic rule. Nothing that could mortify and upset her daughter omitted the old bitch except beatings, and that was because she didn't have the strength to apply them. The poor girl would rather be beaten a thousand times than have to suffer what she suffered daily.

Without the intimate and deep love of Jesus Christ, without the communion, which each morning renewed his spiritual strength, he would have succumbed to the crushing weight of his cross. But, "I can do everything through him who strengthens me" she repeated to St. Paulo; and when at times she felt too oppressed or too exasperated, she would slowly go out and kneel before the crucifix; he retreated intimately to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; he prayed, wept and rose calm, serene, happy. Sometimes, God, so alive, revealed to him the worth of the cross supported, which, with transports of love and gratitude, blessed him because of the sufferings he had granted him.

So years passed; the girl's heroic patience managed to soften the old sick woman's hard heart a little, so much so that she, by her own inspiration, demanded the help of the Religion.

How many such facts would not come to light if it were lawful to roll up the veil that demures the domestic secrets of so many families, in whose womb an unhappy woman is the daily victim of a brutal husband, enraptured, without conscience or morality; of a jealous man, avaricious, imperious, despotic, without attention or delicacy! It's real hell!

But Religion converts this hell into Purgatory of copious sanctification, and divine consolations especially soothe the bitterness of such a bitter situation.

And the miserable children? How many are hemmed in under the relentless yoke of a heartless master? They mistreat them, abuse their weakness and isolation; work is demanded of them beyond their strength; they equate them with dogs; sometimes they lack food and sleep, they choke off their freedom; make them wither.

Poor things! If only they were allowed to learn the Holy Religion, which could only console them!

If they were allowed to come to the good Jesus, Friend of the weak, Father of the little ones and orphans, Comforter of the unfortunate!

To enumerate the whole caste of mistreatment that is imminent to us in this world, it would be necessary to go through the entire scale of human perversities.

For any of them, the only remedy is the love of Jesus Christ, the fervent practice of his holy Religion.

XIV

ON POVERTY AND THE PAINFUL DEPRIVATIONS THAT IT RESULTS

Poverty, like bodily suffering, entered the world through the terrible door of sin. It was not God who made poverty, as He did not make sickness and death; on the contrary, he wanted us to be happy in all respects. Poverty is one of the punishments for sin.

"Yes, the reader will object; but perhaps I am more a sinner than others, who are rich and live in abundance." This is not what is said, but that God is not responsible for our privations; but rather sin and the devil, father of sin.

With regard to poverty, it is the same as with regard to illness: not all sinners are sick; but when they are, it happens in consequence of sin.

Whatever the nature of suffering that falls to us by chance, we must always bear it with the same resignation, with the same faith, with the same spirit of penance. When God allows some men to be poor, others sick, others sick, etc., He has a plan of mercy for each of them that it is not for us to fathom, but to adore deeply. If God afflicts us one way rather than another, let us be convinced, it is because that way is more useful to our eternal salvation. If he nails us to the naked cross of poverty, we must, like Job reduced to extreme misery, bless and not curse the One who makes us pass here in the crucible of privation, just to enrich us magnificently and eternally in heaven.

Whether we like it or not, it is strength for everyone to suffer in this world: this has been, since sin, the law of penance, a law that does not allow for exceptions. Without suffering there is no penance, and therefore there can be no Paradise either. Thus, strength is suffering: and why not suffer as a poor person?

"But, the objection goes on, any other kind of suffering would be preferable to poverty, which is the bitterest of all."—Perhaps so; but, the question is another. Since you are poor, this is a clear proof that God wants to lead you to heaven in this way and no other way. Now, if so, why would you want to choose another path?

Do you think this one is more lurid than any other? Big mistake it is. Do you want to know what is the suffering that each one of us considers the most intense and unbearable? is the one who is supporting. The poor believe that it is poverty; the sick, which is the disease; the prisoner, which is the prison; the slandered, which is slander, and so on.

Believe me, reader: carry and keep your cross, without envying the fate of anyone who seems to you more favorably allocated. If the rich don't have your cross, they have others, which, even because they are layered with gold and luxury, are no longer more atrocious. How many rich I saw cry and very bitterly!

One day, in tears, a widowed lady and mother of a family said to me: "I am the most wretched woman! There are times when I go mad and I want to kill myself." And he had an income in excess of four hundred thousand pounds!

Kings, they say, are very happy: they lack nothing; swim in luxury. One of them was just telling his prime minister that, disgusted and extremely tired of power, he wanted to get dismissed: "My friend, your imprisonment is temporary; I am sentenced to life in galleys." Here is the mold of the great happiness of the rich and powerful.

Poor people, let us not envy the rich.

This only serves to add another evil to our evil: exasperation.

Those who allow themselves to be possessed by such weakness are lacking in reason and faith. A proof of that, here it is; whœver will give it to us is really poor, very poor, poor beyond being:

One day the venerable João Tauler, famous preacher of the order of St. Dominic, was descending the steps of the cathedral of Colonia, where he was preaching the seasons of Lent. "My Father, alms for God's sake," said a beggar, who was crouched by the door. Turning, Tauler saw the wretch, who was horrible to behold: a cancer had eaten away part of his face; it had only one leg and one arm; some rags barely covered the rest of his miserable body. The Religious, for all his charity, cannot repress instinctive disgust. Fearing that the poor man had noticed her and felt depressed, he stopped, approached him, and putting alms in his small hand, said affectionately: "Good morning, my friend." "—Thank you, my Father," replied the beggar mildly; I don't lack what you desire."Thinking that the poor man had not heard correctly, Tauler repeated more articulately: "—My friend, I wish you good morning." — I understand perfectly, my Father; and, I repeat, I have what you desire of me." Astonished and almost impatient, the illustrious preacher insisted thus: "—How? do you not understand me? I wish you good morning." —My Father, replied the poor man in a low and gentle voice, you have the charity to wish me good morning; I cannot answer you except by repeating what I have already said: God has given me that you desire me; all my days are good; today, like all the others, is a good day. Thank God I have never had bad days in my life."I have what you desire me." Astonished and almost impatient, the illustrious preacher insisted thus: "—How? do you not understand me? I wish you good morning." —My Father, replied the poor man in a low and gentle voice, you have the charity to wish me good morning; I cannot answer you except by repeating what I have already said: God has given me that you desire me; all my days are good; today, like all the others, is a good day. Thank God I have never had bad days in my life."I have what you desire me." Astonished and almost impatient, the illustrious preacher insisted thus: "—How? do you not understand me? I wish you good morning." —My Father, replied the poor man in a low and gentle voice, you have the charity to wish me good morning; I cannot answer you except by repeating what I have already said: God has given me that you desire me; all my days are good; today, like all the others, is a good day. Thank God I have never had bad days in my life."are good all my days; today's, like all the others, is a good day. Thank God I have never had bad days in my life."are good all my days; today's, like all the others, is a good day. Thank God I have never had bad days in my life."

The language and the tone of voice singularly impressed the Religious, who, feeling familiar with the beggar, observed him: "My son, what you have just said is quite extraordinary. As in this state in which I see you, you have

no bad days !" "—No, my Father, from childhood a good priest has taught me, that God only afflicts those he loves and sends only evil to purify and test his servants. I learned more, that God is my heavenly father , infinitely good, infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, that he loves me with maternal and incomprehensible love, and that if I love him too, everything that happens to me can only be for my good. , without worrying about tomorrow, which does not belong to me, I got used to considering everything as coming from God and to receiving both good and evil from his father's hand. When my infirmities make me suffer, I bless him and think of the cross of my Saviour; when I don't suffer, I bless him for the peace he gives me! When I have to eat, as blessing God; when I have nothing, I fast in expiation of my sins and also and for all those who do not fast. I try to pray the best I can and not leave the presence of God. I often think of heaven, sometimes of hell; and my heart swells with joy when I think that life is short and that soon I will be eternally happy in heaven." Father Tauler, who had listened to everything with religious admiration and tears flooded his cheeks, said: My friend "I asked to God for me. Thank you for the good you have done to me!" And warmly embracing the beggar friend, he went back into the Church, to slowly meditate on the great lesson of holiness he had just heard. And you too, poor dear ones, meditate before God on the secret of happiness discovered by a brother of misfortune. No more moaning or cursing you; find every opportunity to deserve a splendid seat in Paradise.

XV

OF A SIMPLIFICIAL MEANS SO THAT DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY DON'T MORT US TOO MUCH

Such a means consists in not looking at those above, but rather at those below us; it consists in blessing God for the goods we possess, excluding those we could, or perhaps should, possess.

Inverse practice requires the spiritual life, where what is needed is to keep our eyes fixed on those who exceed us.

Comparing ourselves with those who are inferior to us in virtues, we will not protect ourselves from dangerous fading, and we will believe that we already do enough, if not too much, on the paths of perfection. Perhaps we will succumb to the temptation to repeat the Pharisee's intended prayer in the temple: "Lord, I thank you that I am much better than all these, much more virtuous than they; I receive frequent communion; I do more works of charity, etc." On the contrary, it emphasizes that we place ourselves in parallel with the good servants of God, whose presence is only enough to make us run away from our slackness, and encourages us to continue with greater ardor in the ways of the Gospel.

As for the goods of this world, we repeat, the adoptable rule is the opposite. When the comparison is made with those who are most favorably endowed, with ease, whatever our position, we will reput ourselves worthy of pity and our hearts will be riddled with bad feelings of emotion. exasperation and sadness.

A very wealthy landlord, in good standing, who had at least forty thousand pounds of income, had such a great regret that he was not as rich as two of his close relatives that he almost lost his mind. He kept repeating: "Can one perhaps live decently on forty thousand pounds of income?" This poor rich man did not enjoy; he believed himself to be truly poor.

Saints and true Christians have a soul of another temper: more faithful, they are therefore more reasonable.

They bless God for what he deigns to give them; little or a lot, they are always happy.

Saint Francis of Assisi was walking one day accompanied by one of the blessed, who were in a way the first fruits of the Minims. he went, as he used to, barefoot, begging for bread, having as his only wealth the treasure of Heaven, Jesus Christ, which he carried in his chest as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit. St. Francis and Brother Masseo prayed as they walked, and only left to speak to God to speak of God.

Weary, they stopped in the middle of the Apennines, on the edge of a clear stream, at the angle of a cliff.

Brother Masseo opened the bag containing the alms from which they lived, only a few hard crusts of very dry bread were left, which were placed between him and St. Francis.

After giving thanks to God with angelic fervor, the Saint began to cry. Asking his companion the cause of his tears, he said: "I cannot help but be moved and bless God for the liberality he lavishes on a sinner like me, who does not deserve the magnificent meal that his kindness to give me Brother Masseo, a little taken aback, looked at the crusts of bread and thought to himself: "Magnificent meal? Brother François is not demanding!" Responding to this thought, the Saint said to him: Look, Brother Masseo, and tell me if we must not bless Our Lord! Look at the clear water he has created; it is for us He's running there. Look at the beautiful sky; it was for you, for me that God made it. These beautiful trees, these flowers, these little birds; all these belong to our Father and are for us. Is not this bread that he gives us enough to sustain us? Doesn't your kindness treat us much better than many others who don't have what we now have? Let us therefore rejoice and bless Providence, without coveting the goods of this world."

If they were careful to nourish their hearts with such thoughts, how many poor, in the midst of their privations, would not find themselves immediately remedied and relieved?

There are very few who, looking down, could not find plenty of reasons to bless providence. There are so many miseries in this world that it is difficult not to find one at once that will take advantage of ours.

The extended rule is perfectly applicable in relation to those people who, without properly struggling with poverty, live in need of means and suffer relative deprivation. There is then no point in looking forward to a better past. You have what is strictly necessary: so many others do not have it, have not had it, will not have it! Though modest, you have a room, a room of your own: so many people slept outside tonight, or else, shivering with cold, had as their only miserable shelter a shelter, where they can hardly sleep!

Your meal is sober: yes; but in the end you had to eat and did not know, as did your children, the horrors of famine; whereas, even today, how many hundreds, how many thousands of unhappy people have gone to bed without having eaten anything, absolutely nothing, not even a piece of bread!

Notwithstanding, then, the reality of your more than grievous privations, do not grieve. Think of others who are still poorer. What is the use of proceeding differently? What is the use of fostering what we don't have, what we can no longer have? Is this not a useless affliction? Is it not aggravating the evil and at the same time losing the merit of resignation?

Yes, always look to those below you; and, with the hopes, the strength and the peace that faith gives to the true children of God, mix a smile with your tears and you will bless the heavenly Father, who will never abandon you.

XVI

THAT OUR LORD MADE HIMSELF POOR TO CONSULATE THE POOR

The main consolation of the sick and the sick is the love of Jesus Christ suffering and crucified: the main consolation of the poor, almost the only one, is this same love, it is Jesus, contemplated in the complete poverty of his crib, of his childhood, of all your life and death.

However poor you may be, can you be more than your God in the manger of Bethlehem, stunted by cold, deprived of asylum, lying on coarse straw, which even this one does not belong to? More than the one who said, "Foxes have a hole and birds of the air a nest; but has the son of man nowhere to lay his head?" Can you be as poor as Jesus, as your Lord, who was stripped of his garments and expired naked on the cross?

Jesus is indisputably the Great Comforter of all the poor. The most sweet Jesus calls to himself the poor from the heights of heaven, from the bosom of the Tabernacle, where love holds him captive "Come to me, tell them with particular tenderness; come to me, all you poor dear, beloved of my soul! And I will comfort you.

Learn from me that I am meek and lowly in heart; learn from me to bear the cross of poverty; and in me you will find the rest of your souls, Submit yourselves cheerfully to the heavy yoke, which I, your God will first bear, not only to save you, but also to comfort you; my love will make you feel soft, and the weight that we carry together will therefore be lighter!"

Without Jesus Christ poverty is intolerable, and it is perfectly conceived, without ceasing to censure him, that a wretch, deprived of everything, without bread, homeless, without friends, loses his reason and in suicide seeks the apparent end of his ills .

In another time, in Paris, I met an unhappy woman, widow of an inferior employee, who, finding herself reduced to poverty, tried three times to commit suicide. She was an honorable woman, according to the concept of the world, but she had no religion. His reasoning was simple, and, in his wrong way of looking at things, fair. Life is, she reasoned, a crushing burden. I'd rather die than suffer daily deprivation and humiliation."

After converting to the faith, she did not know how to thank God for the grace of having taken her from the eternal abyss, into which she was madly falling. "Twice, he told me, they took me from the bottom of the water, already unconscious. Another time, a neighbor casually entered my house, when I was about to asphyxiate myself; she barely had time to break the window with my hand. Where would I be now, my God, if, in spite of me, your goodness hadn't saved me?! Today, the poor old woman added, I no longer want to kill myself: I suffer a lot, it's true, and the future no better is offered to me than the present; but I am with God, and when the affliction is great, I go to church, read some pious book, and I think that my anguish will not be eternal." By the end of her life, this good lady had become very pious; he took communion two or three times a week. On the days that I commune, — he said, — I forget my poverty and regain some joy."

It is always faith that we lack; we have it; but not living, practical faith. If we had it, the thorns of poverty would almost turn into roses, and, imitating the saints who were poor, we would bless God, even cut off from hardship. We would do like poor Tauler; or like Job. And if we couldn't climb that high, we would at least patiently resign ourselves, like poor Lazarus in the Gospel.

You know this beautiful story, don't you? The unfortunate man lay at the door of a rich Pharisee, who swam in abundance, dressed splendidly, and every day feasted with his friends. Poor Lazarus starved to death; he hopes in vain that the rich Pharisee would remember him. A few crumbs from that very oppressive table would suffice to quench his hunger and no one gave them, not with the purpose of refusing them, but because there was no thought of giving them. And Lazarus, covered with ulcers, satiated with anguish, offered them in silence to God.

At last he died, and, the Gospel tells us, he was taken by the Angels into the bosom of God.

"How? To the bosom of God? It will be said, perhaps. What had he done to go straight to heaven?" — He had been poor and resigned: nothing more.

Someday, in heaven, you will bless the poverty that so much suffering now imposes on you. Yes, you will bless her; but, under only one condition: to have supported it with faith, resignation and humble meekness. Being poor does not in itself entitle you to heaven; nor is the fact of being rich enough to plunge anyone into hell. If it is written about the bad rich man in the Gospel that "he died in his turn and was buried in hell" it does not mean that all the rich will be condemned. No, thank God! condemned will be those who misuse wealth, and forget the poor. The rich are saved through charity; the poor, through resignation and patience.

So, for the poor, what a treasure is resignation! And with what deep joy he must read, through the tears that misery tears from him, the great words of the Son of God: "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God!" To save yourself, to do admirably penance, to acquire immense merits, it is only enough to accept willingly the adversity, which is inevitable, it is only enough to accept with gentle resignation your own destiny.

For you, much more than for the rich, salvation is easy: while everything distances you from Jesus Christ, pushing you to pride and voluptuousness, everything leads you to Jesus Christ, to heaven, rooting you in humility, in penance and submission to God.

How many poor are in heaven who would be in hell if they had been rich! And how many rich are in hell who would be in heaven if they had been poor!

XVII

ON HOW HUMILIATIONS ARE THE CAUSE OF PUNGARY SUFFERING

Humiliation: how many bitterness does this word contain! It is the inner suffering of self-love, that is, of what is most lively and deepest in our corrupted nature. Self-love is the inordinate love of us, which begins with the spirit and then is called pride.

Humiliation is the painful irritation of this self-love of the spirit; lashes, directly mortifies pride. Therefore, it constitutes one of the most bitter sufferings to which man is susceptible.

"But then, — it is said — is humiliation excellent? — Humiliation is like illness: if, it is evil, a disorder that man has not known in the state of innocence; in its effects it can be good, and to great good, "Lord, said a penitent sonnet, it was good that I had been humiliated; through this I learned to know the ways of justice."

Verily, when Christianly accepted, humiliation is marked grace; it becomes the most effective remedy for the most dangerous of vices, pride.

When we accept it like that, it makes us easily humbled; in such a case, he exalts us, in order to lead us to God.

"He who humbles himself will be exalted" says the Gospel. And which is the one who humbles himself? It is the courageous Christian, who does not rebel against humiliation; he is the one who accepts it, as Jesus Christ accepted all the humiliations, all the debasements of his life and of his Passion.

For the true Christian, humiliation is like the fertilizer that makes the earth fertile and productive. The humbled Christian, who sincerely humbles himself, imbibes the divine sap of humility and becomes prodigiously fruitful in true holiness.

Humiliation is still similar to a bitter medicine, repugnant, but very effective: like a good doctor, Our Lord applies it mercifully to those who please; to those who achieve good health, that is, to the humble, to make them even more humble, to fortify them in humility; to the sick, namely, to the vain, to the proud, to the presumptuous, to the hypocrites, to cure them as if in spite of them; In fact, humiliation is the same as poverty: to do penance when we are poor, it is enough for us to resign ourselves and say: Amen — to forced privations; so too, when we are humiliated, it is enough for us to be humble that we do not rebel against humiliation and gladly accept unavoidable evils.

Those who practice it take advantage of the remedy; those who rebel, do not profit and persevere in pride, which most painfully makes them feel the bitterness of humiliation. In this way, evil is doubled for them, while for others it becomes good.

In this world, we are exposed to humiliations of a very different nature. Thus, we are sometimes humiliated internally and in front of ourselves; at other times, externally and in front of one or many people.

We can be rightly humiliated, having deserved it; or unfairly, without any fault on our part. We can still be humiliated by good men, by our parents, by our legitimate superiors; or, on the contrary, by the wretched, by the most debased creature.

Sometimes humiliation is a passing accident: other times it lasts and becomes permanent.

Whichever way one looks at humiliation, it always entails poignant suffering. But one of the most bitter humiliations, which is why all material and heart deprivations reinforce it, is certainly the one that accompanies the disturbances of fortune and position and demure misery. What tortures in this hovel where a poor family that was once rich, or at least remedied, languishes from hunger and cold! Once, in Paris, I came across an unfortunate lady, just forty years old, who had gone to hide her confusion and despair not in a room or some attic, but in a kind of miserable woodshed, where she shivered with cold, dressed in linen in the heart of winter, and with only a piece of hard bread and a little water near her! Some years before, he lived in beautiful rooms, where his father gave splendid soirees. A failed one-day transaction brought misery; the disgraced father had died of despair; and the daughter, abandoned by her friends as well as her fortune, was reduced to the sad extreme already described. He didn't dare, let's put it that way, to come out of his hiding place, and he would rather starve than beg.

On the same street, another family reduced to poverty was surprised one day while at the table. Around it were seated four people; the father, the mother a girl and a boy. In the middle of the table there was a single plate containing five or six crusts of hard bread: a bottle of water and two or three glasses. This included the entire dinner of the unfortunates, who were very sorry to have been surprised at the time of their meal.

The father was dressed in black, and, at first glance, with such or such decency. The poor mother had only one dress, black, worn and patched. The son, emaciated and almost pale, suffered from the chest as a result of prolonged deprivation. As for the girl; that day and night he worked more or less to support his family, such was his thinness that he looked like a walking corpse. A few days later, she went crazy; and the doctors verified that the disorder of the brain evidently stemmed from the moral and physical tortures that demure misery had imposed on this unfortunate woman.

Too late it was learned of the existence of this family, which had once lived in wealth. Desperate at his daughter's madness, and no doubt losing his mind as well, the father drowned. Unable to resist any longer, and grated with grief, the mother began to spew blood and died ethics. Left alone in the world, the poor boy tried for some time to fight adversity through work; but his strength died, and he went to the hospital to die.

One day when I went to this unhappy family's house, I noticed that they had a dog. Observing me that it would not be easy to support this animal: It is true, replied the disgraced mother; it is simple gratitude: for a whole week this dog has delivered us from death. We had absolutely nothing to eat; we dared not declare this to anyone.

Two other cooks in the house took a liking to the animal; and now one, now another brought him some scraps of food; and, he added, stifling a sigh, we shared his ration. You understand now, sir, that we had no heart to deprive ourselves of it."

And such heart-breaking events are very common, especially in large cities.

Holy God, pride must be a great evil to bring about such severe punishment And how great is your mercy, which converts such poignant sufferings into a salutary remedy!

XVIII

WHAT WE MUST DO WHEN WE ARE HUMBLE

It is important to avoid two extremes, two illusions under which the offended self-love takes refuge: irritation or insensitivity. Neither is proper for Christians.

Just or unjust, come from whœver comes, humiliation produces, as a natural effect, irritation or indignation; the blush rises in waves to the face; blood bubbles in the brain; anger shakes the heart and the whole body. Strength is to energetically contain this first outburst of pride, or even of what is legitimate in self-love; for in no case, says the Scripture, does the wrath of man move the righteousness of God.

The other excess is such and such an interior prostration, a kind of despondency, of discouragement that, if left unchecked, would soon result in moral abasement, degrading altogether, unworthy not only of Christians, but also of good men.

When we are humbled, we must neither be elevated nor disguised: let us be firm and humble.

Herein lies the truth, the true Christian rule.

The servant of God must habitually live in that peace, strong and gentle, which is the child of God's habitual presence, purity of conscience, and the concern of eternity. The peace in which his soul is consolidated becomes an easy shield with which to cover himself against the humiliations that come.

When this fidelity is lacking in advance, it is more difficult to resist the clashes; but, with the grace of God, victory is still achieved. In such cases, the strategy is to enjoy silence, which is a first-strength defensive weapon; he allows the soul, readily and easily, to rise to God, to unite with Our Lord and implore His help: "Lord! come to my aid! Deliver me from wrath! Give me your peace, your gentleness, your patience."

It is also necessary that, on such occasions, we deeply humble ourselves before God. "Lord, I'm just a sinner and I deserve to be humiliated. Since you allow it, my God, I deserve to suffer like this, No pride and self-love! Jesus, gentle and lowly in heart, have mercy on me!"

And then, let us glance at our God, downcast, satiated with reproaches during his Passion.

Like Him, with Him, let us bear it all in silence, and let us forgive, out of His love, those who offend us.

When we have the opportunity, when we are alone with God, let us once again meditate on the Passion, that great tranquilizer of all human pains; let us transport ourselves in spirit to the Prætorium, to Calvary; let us behold our head, the one of whom we are living members, whom we must follow and imitate! They call him a liar, an imposter, a madman, a blasphemer; they harass him; they impute to him acts he did not do; they lend him words he has not spoken; to Him, who was infinite innocence, they bind like a deceiver; they drag him into the presence of the judges; they hurt him; they spit in his face; they condemn him to die infamously between two thieves. And He doesn't open His lips! Having willingly taken upon himself your sins, which deserve all humiliation, he acknowledges, with love and in spite of his divine innocence, prostrated before the Heavenly Father, that all these humiliating outrages are due him. That's why he doesn't complain. That is why he humbles himself to death and to the death of the cross, in order to obtain for us the grace to imitate him.

In humiliations, especially if they are great and prolonged, let us seek Jesus through communion. Let us unite ourselves, as often and as closely as possible, with the divine Humiliated, with the humble par excellence, and let us drink in their sacred heart the superhuman peace, humility and meekness that radiates, so to speak, of his Passion.

With Jesus Christ in your heart, it is not difficult to be humble. With Him, outrage and contempt, slander and insult, the injustices of men, are gladly endured; in short, the painful ordeal of humiliations.

XIX

TO THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF THE SERVICE OF GOD

There are two kinds of pursuits: big and small; the small ones are frequent and almost no one is exempt from them; the great ones put life at risk, or at least liberty, and, thank God, they are rarely exercised with bitterness. Ordinarily, piety motivates the former; in childhood or adolescence one has to live among irreligious companions; these begin to make mockery and serrazine; they hand out ridiculous or insulting nicknames. If all of this resists our pity, here they are who throw themselves to the path in fact and sometimes exceed all marks.

I knew a boy who, put by his father in a school where there was only religion in the statutes, was thus persecuted for an entire year, in an unbelievable way.

His fellow disciples intended to prevent him from praying every night before going to bed. They gave him only the names of Tartufo or Judas; as he was only ten years old and the others were all older, and therefore more robust, they beat him at every step. The brave boy did not give in to his purpose. "You will not prevent me," he said, "from doing my duty." It was isolated like a geria; the other children did not play with him, and when he spoke to them they did not respond. Things came to such a point that the bishop became aware of the facts, and wanted to see and cheer the unfortunate victim, getting the parents of this brave Christian boy to place him in an educational establishment, which was less unworthy of him.

No minor setbacks had to suffer, in a high school, a boy of fifteen, whom I knew.

They brought him in a winder, only because he confessed and watched over his morality. They sentenced him to isolation for two or three months. When the fellow-disciples learned that the family, informed of everything, was about to take him out of the high school, they spontaneously, and ensnared, apologized to the Christian boy and begged him not to leave, making protests to respect him thereafter. But he, as courageous then as he had been before, replied: "To forgive you, yes, but to remain in your infamous companions, there is no one who can get it from me." Distinguished magistrate today, the victim of the collegial serrazine of yore retains the fervor of an angel.

Often, not even within the family are these little pursuits of every moment. And how painful in that case! They place us in the contingency of resisting whom we owe only obedience; to resist parents who are not Christian enough to understand godliness: in their view, they exalt fervor; they do not allow their children to attend the sacraments, have devotion, or adopt any pious practice. They forbid doing what the confessor advises; they order what he forbids to be done. How many young souls suffer this domestic persecution!

What is the lead that they should then adopt? It is only possible in such cases to establish very general indications; because everything depends on particular circumstances, and it is up to each one's sense and prudence to find the middle ground between the condescension that is due to the paternal authority and the fidelity that must be kept to the voice of conscience. No one can be sacrificed to conscience, not even one's parents; but, in order to discriminate from conscience what is but scruples or illusions, it is advisable to follow the dictates of some enlightened confessor, or, in his absence, of some person of solid piety, who is or has shown himself in the case of giving good advices.

Since man clearly knows what he can and what he must do, he must have a firm resolve and fear nothing; then true prudence consists in energy, and peace will be the consequence of the strength that faith produces. Let us make God's will known to us, and let everything else go. We must obey God rather than men.

Most of the saints were persecuted by their own; tears as abundant as they were bitter bathed the first manifestations of his vocation. St. Thomas Aquinas, when he was only eighteen years old, had to endure, by his family, not only mistreatment, but also a kind of imprisonment. Without reaching this extreme, St. Francis de Sales had to struggle for a long time with his father's

discontent and despair. St. Francis of Assisi was the victim of insults and abuse not only by his father, who treated him as a madman, but also by his brother, who never lost his opportunity to ridicule and humiliate him. And St. Stanislaus Kotska, who was forced to flee and cross most of Europe on foot in order to reach Rome and enter the novitiate in the company of Jesus! And so many others, not to mention all! Let's imitate them, not in their wonderful and truly inimitable works, but in the spirit of faith, perseverance, courageous fidelity, and contempt for human respects.

When we suffer persecution for Jesus Christ's sake, then we must double our prayers, that we steadfastly stand in humility, peace, and meekness, and fellowship more often. To faithfully suffer this small and very serious trial will result in great spiritual benefit, not to mention the beautiful reward that has been promised to all those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice.

Ah! not all endure to the end. He finished his education at an excellent college in Paris, a young man from a wealthy family. In virtue, he had the same primacy that he had in classes: he was esteemed and loved by teachers and students.

A model of praiseworthy and true piety, he took communion three or four times a week, and was the incitor and soul of all good works, as well as all amusements. Long ago he had conceived the firm intention of consecrating himself to God in the Holy Society of Jesus.

To his father, who was in America, he wrote asking him to bless his project and his vocation. The father boards without wasting time; he suddenly arrives at the school, where his son was finishing his studies so brilliantly, sends for him, takes him with him in the presence of the entire collegiate body, declaring that he would never consent to his son's project. However, this father was not irreligious: on the contrary; and the college, where he himself had placed his son, not being directed by the Jesuits, nothing authorized such an extraordinary procedure. Skillful, hellish pursuit was set against the lad. His father made him go to every public performance and dance, and every trance wanted to make him worldly.

'He was quite rich: he demanded that his son dress with all the care and affect the manners of the most wildly extravagant young men. She even made him enter into dangerous relationships, preferring that he lose his morals than persevere in his manifested vocation.

It was harassment in terms. So it was. The miserable father sang victory. Having lost his son, it was impossible to contain him any longer, for he consecrated to evil all the ardor and all the strength he had once had for good. At the age of twenty-six, worn out by depravities, he died without sacraments, in somber despair, cursing his father and crumpling in his hands the letter of an unfortunate woman whom he had shot to perdition.

However, after six months, the citadel still offered no loopholes. In fact, the miserly persecuted said to a close friend: "See this room: it is the confidant of many tears. Tonight we returned from the masked ball at four o'clock in the morning; and until dawn I began to cry and pray here, on my knees, before this crucifix." And the floor, where indicated, was still wet with tears. "This ceaseless struggle," he added, "will eventually kill me. I don't know if I can hold out for long."

At all costs and immediately, this wretch should have escaped the undignified abuse of power to which he was the victim. No one has the right to interpose himself between God and his creature; and in this case it was, or never will, to proclaim the oracle of the Saviour: "He who loves father or mother, brothers or sisters, wife or children, fortune or life more than that to me."

XX

HOW SHOULD WE ENDURE THE GREEN PROVATION OF PERSECUTION PROPERLY

The real persecution, the great persecution is the storm that from time to time the raging ragings of impiety or heresy rise up against the Church. It is always more or less violent; it exerts its rigors mainly against prominent Christians, and even more against priests and religious. When he cannot imprison, he cuts off all means of defense, outrages, vexes in a thousand ways.

In order to carry out his business, the persecutor, that is, the devil, makes use of the persecutors; more often than not, he uses those who govern, maddening them, leading them to promulgate supposed laws, filling their mouths with beautiful words: reason d'state — national sovereignty — public salvation — reform of abuses — repression of fanaticism and of reaction—and other lies like that. Are these not the curses with which heaven and earth are thundered every day?

No illusions: persecution is always and always imminent. Since Luther and Calvin, since Voltaire and Robespierre, he hasn't slept, let's say, for an instant. Like a volcano, it rumbles softly, and at spaces it erupts. Let us always be ready: because nobody knows the day or the hour.

Let's start by not finding it strange, if we see her engaged in slandering us and putting us out of the law, "Do not marvel," Jesus Christ tells us, if the world hates you. Didn't it hate me in the first place? They hate you because they hate you because they hate you because you are my disciples. The disciple is not superior to the Master: they have persecuted me; they will also persecute you. But do not fear them; fear not those who kill only the body and can do nothing afterwards. Fear not, beloved flock; for it pleased your Father in heaven to give you his kingdom, Be confident; I have conquered the world."

Persecution is the daily bread of the Church on earth.

Hatred and persecution of the wicked, in a way, is a favorable sign. St. Augustine once wrote to St. Jerome: "I have always consecrated to you, and I love Our Lord who dwells in you. The whole world exalts your courage: Catholics admire and revere you as the defender of the true faith; and, what is most glorious yet, all heretics detest you."

If we looked like the bad guys, we'd be covered for their rage. Whom the devil and his instruments persecute in our person is Jesus Christ, who lives in us, and of which we are earthly members. Is it not glorious enough to suffer for the sake of truth and justice?

When persecution, like a bloody sea, covers us with its waves and sprinkles us with foam, let us keep this truth well present in our minds. Through a very holy, very pure life, through most fervent prayer, let us keep ourselves, more closely than ever, united to Jesus Christ. "Watch and pray—He tells us—that you may not succumb to the trial." The Apostles, at the moment of the Passion, abandoned their Master because they had not prayed enough. Therefore, when persecution is imminent, or when its rigors already develop, let us pray, more and better than usual, and let us frequent more often and more holy the sacraments of the Church, source of all strength.

Let us not be distressed if persecutors strip us of the goods of fortune: our true treasure, which is Jesus Christ, cannot snatch it from us.

If they reach the extreme of material violence, let us not forget that their predecessors did as much to our God. Let's be quiet and suffer with this one. How many violences, so many will be our flowers of eternal glory.

If they throw us into prisons, let us enter them, and there we remain peacefully with Jesus, the sweetest companion, who was also thrown into the prisons of the Temple, where, all night before Good Friday, alone, helpless of men, he was at the mercy of Jewish soldiers. He descends to prisons and prisons to accompany his faithful servants.

If they exile us, if they deport us, let us go with God!

For the Christian the true homeland is everywhere; because, as I once heard an old man without faith comfort a poor dear who had just lost his mother. This is the best concept he could draw from St. Augustine said, "Jesus Christ is the homeland and the dwelling place of our soul."

Finally, if we are accused of fantastic crimes; if they condemn us to death, because we belong to Jesus Christ, because we want to remain faithful to his Vicar and to his Church, because we hate the wickedness of the wicked and their sacrilegious laws, ah! let us have enough faith to thank God, who deems us worthy to suffer and die for Him! Let us suffer and die with our Savior, with Him, for His sake. This all lasts for a moment, and the reward will be eternal!

For this reason, one of the recent martyrs of Ton King, the young missionary Theophano Venard, joyfully walked to the place of torment; the generous martyr, to the executioner who offered to cut him off at a single blow, responded fervently: "The longer it lasts, the greater will be the torment!"

This is the spirit that should animate us.

Indeed, faith makes heroes of the most feeble of men. Faith, living faith, ardent faith is what produces martyrs. Let us humbly ask Jesus Christ, "Author and Finisher of our faith," as the holy martyrs asked of him: he will grant it to us.

Such a faith were professed and confessed beforehand by all those who, from the beginning, lived and died for the true God. "By faith—says the Apostle St. Paul—they conquered kings, put out the lions' throats; quenched the burning fire, blunted the edge of swords. Weak, they triumphed; they became heroes in the struggle. Some had disjointed limbs. , not wanting to rescue the life of this world, in order to become worthy of a better

resurrection; others, faced insults, violence, fetters and prisons; were stoned, sawed, put to the test in torture; they were killed with the edge of the sword. from whom the world was not worthy, they were forced to flee, stripped of everything, reduced to misery, to anguish, to the most bitter afflictions!

"And we, — continues St. Paul — we, who have before our eyes such a great, such a splendid host of martyrs, let us trample under our feet the sin that surrounds us, and let us fly, through patience, to the combat offered to us. " Jesus Christ, who fought on their side, will also fight on our side, with the unique condition of being faithful to him, faithful in life and in death.

In everything that concerns the purity of the faith, let us remain humbly united with the Pope, infallible doctor of the Church; let us believe what he teaches; let us reject what he condemns; let us not listen to anyone who wants to step aside, even if he is a priest and even a bishop. In times of turmoil, crisis, persecution, it highlights, more than at any other time, the union with the Vicar of Jesus Christ through perfect obedience.

Let us pray to God and imitate the courage of this generous Catholic, who, just a short time ago, when the saddest days of the revolution of 1870 were going on, wrote in the face of the triumphant blasphemers: "I promise, I swear, I take a commitment before God and men to always recognize the authority of the Pope, to obey him always, to believe what he teaches, to reject what he condemns, to direct myself, in the domains of belief, doctrine and thought, absolutely in accordance with his infallible teachings, which they were, are and will be for me, until my last breath, the teaching of God himself."

And then it is necessary to ask Jesus and Mary daily for the gift of strength, one of the most precious gifts of the Holy Spirit, which is particularly necessary in times of persecution. It was he who sustained the martyrs amid terrible trials, in prisons, in tortures. It was he who made them triumph over Satan and the executioners. Let us ask for it, with instance, for ourselves and for our brothers.

Finally, let us keep in mind the practical rules that Our Lord gives us in this regard in his Gospel: "I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Be therefore prudent as serpents and simple as doves. Beware of men. : because they will deliver you up in their assemblies, and they will scour you in their meetings.

And for my sake you will be dragged before your governors and courts. When they deliver you thus, do not think about what you will have to answer; for at that time it will be given you what you must say; for ye shall not speak, but it will be the Spirit of the Heavenly Father that speaks in you. And all will hate you because of my name; and whœver endures to the end, he will be saved.

When they chase you in one place, I flee to another. Fear not them. Fear not those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him whom soul and body can cast into hell.

All the hairs on your head are numbered, and not a single one will fall without your heavenly Father willing.

He that beareth witness for me before men, I will bear witness for him

before my Father who is in heaven; on the contrary, whœver denies me before men, I will deny him also before my Father who is in heaven.

He who does not accept his cross and who does not want to follow me is not worthy of me. He who seeks to preserve his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it again."

Such were the Master's words. Let us deeply engrave them in our memory and in our hearts. They produced the martyrs. "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for love of righteousness, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Yea, blessed are ye, when men curse and persecute you, and when for my sake they say, lying, every quality of evil against you."

And Jesus added:

"Blessed are you who weep now, for one day you shall be comforted! Blessed are you when, because of the Son of man, men hate you, repel you, and satiate you with outrages, rejecting your mother as accursed. Rejoice then, and tremble for joy: for a great reward is reserved for you in heaven."

Suffer and die for Jesus Christ! There is no possibility for the Christian of a greater destiny. If the opportunity to harvest this palm comes across one day, let us not miss it.

XXI

TO INCARRIAGES AND TO ALL THOSE WHO ENDORSE THE SUFFERINGS OF CAPTIVITY

Imprisonment deserved or undeserved is always cruel suffering. So dear is freedom, how heavy is its deprivation. The brutal treatments inflicted on them in the extreme aggravate the situation of the inmates; here is what could be called aggravating circumstances of prison: damp and biting cold during the winter, stifling and infected atmosphere during the summer, filthiness, boiling of animals, poor and insufficient food, lack of the most necessary things for life, prolonged isolation, or on the contrary, perpetual contact with ignoble and coarse companions, etc., etc. The tails of comets alone are longer than they are; so, too, these ordinary consequences of imprisonment constitute sufferings a thousand times more atrocious than the deprivation of liberty.

It is a great comfort to those who have the eyes of faith, that imprisonment is a salutary thing for most of the prisoners; it calls them to reflection, obliges them to think — about God — who then opens his arms and his heart. In fact, who shows compassion and affection for these unfortunates, if not the prison chaplain? Now, the priest is Jesus Christ himself, who, through the ministry of a man, comes to the prisoner, in order to console him and teach him to sanctify the penalty.

Seclusion becomes a most remarkable grace for the Christian, when he takes advantage of this kind of obligatory retreat, to be reconciled with God and to do penance. How many miserable soldiers I once knew in the military prison in Paris, whom the life of a tarimba had completely corrupted; drunkenness and debauchery had served them as ladders to crime, and military justice, in condemning them, had been an echo only of the justice of

God. But the justice of God is a treasure of paternal mercy, which is not the justice of men; many times, just a single word, a little book, a simple demonstration of affection was enough to convert these poor souls. Many I knew who, within just a month, from being wicked, had become truly admirable Christians. They welcomed with pleasure the privations and the opportunity they gave them to penance. "All this is little compared to my sins—one of them said. God, who was not guilty like me, suffered much more for my sake."

"My Father, said another, to whom I had given a small manual, and who read it constantly; my Father, if I had known what I now know, and had practiced throughout my life everything that this little book recommends, surely I wouldn't have done what I did, and I wouldn't be where I am!"

Another said to me, after an excellent communion: "Having been arrested and having had time to think about something in my soul, it was still a great favor that God did me. Without this prison, I was lost. Not for the future. I will do what I did again."

Restored to liberty, it is true, not all inmates persevere in such good dispositions; but, besides the fact that Christian perseverance is generally the most important point for everyone, many of them persevere more or less, and some even remain very good. Among others, I had the opportunity to meet one who had been sentenced to two years in prison for desertion under aggravating circumstances. He had faith, he had been brought up in a Christian way: loneliness and misfortune soon converted him. I attended the sacraments every week; he prayed almost continuously; the already mortifying penance of incarceration added voluntary mortifications. He only read good books, and in such a way that he was able to convert thirty or forty companions from misfortune.

After completing his sentence, he entered the Trapa novitiate, where he was a model of regularity and fervor. Unable to be a Trappist for health reasons, he entered the less austere order of the Brothers of St. John of God. Cheerful, humble as a child, obedient, dedicated, he has been unveiling for many years in the service of the incurable and alienated poor. "The happiness I enjoy is inexpressible," he wrote to me a short time ago; it seems that I am already in heaven."

Indeed, prison, the cruel and gloomy prison, restored to many souls true freedom, and therefore true joy, true happiness. A religious saint told me that while he was in a Welsh prison, preaching mission, one of those unfortunates, who had come out from among hundreds of other galleys, came to him and told him of the supernatural peace that flooded his soul, for more than ten years that he was in the cobblestone. "It was, he said—the divine mercy that brought me to the galleys. Though I was not the perpetrator of the crime which was imputed to me, however, I was guilty of great guilt in my life; and, to my regret, I doubted even forgiveness. After the humiliation and suffering that enveloped me, I felt completely changed. I enjoy a deep peace: I feel that God is with me." The Father added that, in his opinion, perhaps this was the most admirable soul he had ever seen.

So, then, unfortunate prisoner, if this little book can reach your ergastulo, receive it with attention; It's a friend. Do not be angry at the penalty imposed on you, justly or unjustly. How did this blessed galley, undoubtedly sinful, and

much? Well then, accept prison as a most just penance. Believe me, the fiery prison of Purgatory, and even more the eternal prison of hell, are a thousand times more atrocious than all the prisons on earth; now, merciful God, proposes to you the prison that you are now suffering, in order to evade you from that last one. The deal is profitable; accept it willingly.

But, Our Lord be always with you in your prison! She would be intolerable without this company.

Transform the prison into a kind of monastery in small point (in fact, monastery, means solitude, separation from the world): you are obligatorily alone and separated from the world; accept with glad heart a disgrace that is all unavoidable. Convert the sad prison into a peaceful cell, where Our Lord enters you and where you can enjoy, without hindrance, His most sweet and loving company. If your heart is pure, the Savior will dwell in it. And, therefore, make a particular effort to keep it always very pure, so that you are not alone. "Alas for the lonely!" says the Holy Scripture.

And you know what attracts and keeps in the heart the treasure of purity: it is the sincere repentance of sin; it is the confession, apparently so costly, excellent in reality; it is absolute trust in the minister of God, who is sent to you as a comforting Angel; it is communion, frequent communion, which refreshes courage, enlivens the soul, nourishes the faith, expands hope and makes the heart rejoice. It is the guard of chastity; it is the reading of the Gospel, the Life of the saints, and in general all good books. If you do this, I promise you that your prison will lose most of its bitterness, or at least meekness and peace will comfort you. Do the experiment and you will see.

XXII

THE SUFFERING OF THE HEART AND PARTICULARLY ANXIETY AND ANGUISH ABOUT THE ONES WE LOVE

This kind of suffering is so painful that, when enduring it, it seems impossible for others to exist more closely: In fact, there is no doubt about it, the heart is more sensitive than the body. Of all our organs, the heart is perhaps the most delicate and the deepest; touching it produces death; so too is the heart's suffering the most poignant and the deepest of all.

It is also the noblest; because one seeks only in the dedication of love. And it touches on all loves: maternal love, conjugal love, filial love, fraternal love, friendship, and, in another order of ideas, love for the Church and love for the country. Wounded in any of these holy and venerable affections, the heart suffers the more the more it loves.

Poor mothers are all too familiar with these tortures.

What maternal heart did not press with anguish in front of the bed of the seriously ill child, on which the icy hand of death seemed to be reaching? How many tears shed, on their knees, in front of the crucifix! What sleepless nights!

And during the war, when the future seems more uncertain than the present, how the heart of a poor mother, who thinks of the possible fate, the probable fate of her children, is not torn! "Where is my son?... What has

become of him? It's been a fortnight, a month and I have no news: perhaps he has died? Has he been wounded? Is he sick?—What will become of my daughter if she has the misfortune of to lose me? Who will take care of your delicate health, your education? Who would take your happiness to heart? Imagination swells and multiplies these anxieties, and transforms them into true anguishes.

When it comes to eternal salvation, it all adds up. The Christian mother sees her child, her dear child, turning away from God, leaving the sacraments, not fulfilling the Easter precept, doing wrong, sometimes even becoming a critic of religion and impious: what inexpressible pain! I almost dare say—what despair! Oh! how many Santa Monicas are still in the world! I am referring to holy women, to true Christian mothers, who cry night and day tears of blood! The Augustines, the poor and guilty children, do not even consider the torment they inflict: if they had been given to lift the tip of the veil and look down into the depths of pain which they dig, laughing, they would have a horror of themselves; this alone would be enough to reduce them to the right path.

To these distraught mothers I will remember the words that once upon a time, in Carthage, comforted St. Monica's heart: "Be confident; it is impossible for the son of so many tears to perish." They must, like the mother of St. Augustine, sanctify themselves and save their prodigal children, through incessant prayer and a hope that knows no discouragements; they must do alms and more alms for the salvation of their children, penances and more penances, communions and more communions.

I know a lady of piety who took communion every Friday for the intention of her eldest son, and every Saturday for that of her younger son; he had only two, and both, yielding to the raptures and fire of youth, had divorced themselves from God. I also met another one, who had a Mass of expiation and mercy for her equally lost son, said to me one day with tears in her eyes, in a chapel of the Blessed Virgin. they last forever."

Let these poor mothers go every day, twenty times a day, to the Mother of Sorrows; ask at least a good death for those rebels and fools, who so stubbornly refuse the grace of a good life, often, by the addition of grace, they will also attain a good life; and in such cases, what a large reward for their tears!

After paternal and maternal love, the most ingrained and most intimate of all is conjugal love, it too often hides a sword that pierces the heart. Who can describe the profound suffering of a poor husband, who sees in vain all efforts to prevent the young woman from getting sick from the chest, for example, or from dying of consumption. And as for the wife, who can refer to the anxieties, the poignant pains of absence? particularly in certain grave circumstances, in which the man to whom she has given her heart, the dear companion, whose arm has been her support, suffers fearful dangers? in wartime, for example, mainly as the horrible system of destruction that has prevailed today? or again, in the case of a distant journey, during a long and dangerous preaching?

And this same love, when unrequited or betrayed, with what bitterness does it not poison the entire existence? It is no longer pain that stings, it is the wave of despair that overwhelms us; life shatters; happiness is forever lost.

A person who proposed to analyze all the sufferings of the heart would never end, to count, one by one, the crosses that can, like sharp arrows, sink into the heart of a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a friend. And the sorrows of the Church in dire times!

And the sorrows of the motherland! They tear the breasts of the soul; they lacerate, torture the heart.

Pains like that kill.

Saint Catherine of Siena declared, on her deathbed, that it was not illness but moral pain that robbed her of her life: "I only see, - she said - reasons for affliction and anguish: the persecuted Pope; the holy Roman Church despised by princes and by the great of the earth; monasteries violated; men of prayer forget the Lord; sin abounds; the abomination of desolation has invaded the holy place. It is time to go to God; among so many scandals I could not live any longer."

In this, as in all other sufferings, the refuge and consolation we have is Our Lord Jesus Christ. Half-opening his sacred chest, He shows us the Heart that so loved the world, and whom love caused so much to suffer! What is Jesus Christ, in fact, if not Love incarnate and at the same time Love unrequited and despised? Your adorable Heart knew all sufferings; and no matter how great they tear ours, they will never be more than a drop, in the face of the ocean of bitterness that drowned the Sacred Heart of Jesus Crucified.

Let's go to Him along the two paths that lead straight to your heart, namely: meditation on His adorable Passion; and the Holy Eucharist, in which that heart is so little distant from ours.

Jesus welcomes our poor heart broken by pain, hides it within his, and so closely unites them that the holiness and perfection in love, which fill his sacred Heart, pass into ours and serve as soul, life, strength, light, peaceful and unshakable support. He then makes us suffer as He suffered, with profound patience, with gentle and most sweet humility, with hope more than sure, with the very strength of God.

Furthermore, let us not forget what has already been said: since suffering is unavoidable, let us at least enjoy it; if we cry, let us pray at the same time, and let us not let nature dominate grace, feeling suffocate reason; without it, we would lose the merit of the cross and the suffering would be ten times greater.

In the trances of the heart, as always, the great commitment must be our own sanctification, through calm, energetic and persevering resignation, emanating from the love of Jesus Christ.

XXIII

WAY TO CHRISTIAN SUPPORT THE LOSS OF THE ENTITIES THAT ARE DEAR TO US

Still in order to console us, Our Lord wanted to prove this anguish of the human heart. Lazarus was just his friend; He was going to resurrect him; he knew his life would be restored to him; however, in order to sanctify them, I wanted to suffer the painful trances of the loss of a shudderingly loved one; I wanted to cry; and "JESUS CRY" The Gospel expressly says.

There is nothing more sanctifying than tears, when they are quickened by divine love.

The death of beings, which is deeply clear to us, is, we do not hesitate to say, the pain of pains: "See this coffin," said one day a disgraced worker who, sobbing, was attending the funeral of his only son; inside it goes my life."

Another father told me: "Only the loss of a son I have had to cry, and my little daughter who died was only three years old. Well then, I don't hesitate to say; having to resume such torture. Anyone who has not enjoyed these trances can have no idea of them."

A poor peasant woman had a daughter, a sweet and loving eleven-year-old child: She lost her at that age, after a long and painful illness. Twenty years later, the disgraced mother, dressed in heavy mourning, was still crying. When she said it, or when she heard her daughter's name being said, her white face tightened, her lips trembled, and copious tears burst from her eyes.

In this respect there is no difference between rich and poor. A very rich and high-ranking lady lost, as a result of disaster, a beautiful son, who was about nine years old. True, she rebelled against the horrible ordeal; but his broken heart did not stop suffering, and more profoundly. Six or seven years later, in the high societies where his position gave him entrance, in the halls, at the table, in the midst of any conversation, at every moment, silent tears rolled down his cheeks, which pained everyone, and so much more. , that the victim was making desperate efforts to contain them.

Another, who had lost a sixteen-year-old son, had gone mad for more than a month; the more cheerful father employed such efforts to appear calm, that an attack of paralysis twisted his face. - Yet another mother, this one also rich and hitherto happy, this one, after losing her daughter ten years ago, in a kind of madness, who has resisted everything; don't want to see anyone; hardly speaks. Apparently, it is for such pains that the expression "mad pain" was invented.

Truly, the loss of a child is pain without a name, maddening pain for the maternal heart. The death of the parents, although more in accordance with the laws of nature, is almost as painful. So too, in close-knit couples, the death of a husband or wife. When one of the two leaves, there is no more happiness for the other.

The widow is left without support; the widower, without consolation. To any of them the domestic home seems extinct; the empty house; and the tenderness of children in no way prevents the perpetual and most poignant

sensation of the void left by death. "Losing my poor wife, I lost everything, one of my friends recently told me, a great Christian and a widower for three or four years; she was the joy of my home. I trusted her with all my sorrows; we lived in the most perfect intimacy; and now I feel alone, absolutely alone, always alone! How sad they will be! I spend my time crying and praying."

Death shatters two existences, that of its victims and that of its survivors; or, more accurately, it cuts off the lives of some and the hearts of others at a single stroke.

Only Religion and its infallible hopes can comfort the soul in such a terrible trance. Faith is like the root of the Christian soul: the sweetest hand of hope brings down to that root the cooling water that, little by little, insinuates itself into the whole plant, revives it, from the slope that it was lifting it, and not let the flowers wither; in turn, charity, the love of Jesus Christ, comes like a warm ray of the sun and completes the resurrection that began with hope. Then the poor heart regains peace, even happiness; not that of earth, but that of heaven: earth's happiness is forever lost.

A pious and excellent lady had a daughter who, from the age of twelve, had been afflicted with a singular illness, for which medicine, as so often happens, had been ineffective. This girl was twenty-one years old; since the beginning of his illness, he never got out of bed. He suffered a lot and never complained; docile, amiable, resigned, affable to everyone, grateful for the least care they gave her, she was an object of edification and general admiration. For long years she had taken Communion every week, whenever this was possible. It is easy to understand how tenderly a mother loved such a daughter.

The divine goodness wanted me to give him Holy Communion on the day of his death. Nothing would foreshadow that death was imminent. "My Sister," said the sick girl to the Sister who was treating her, "can you give me something to drink?" Having received the cup from the nurse's hands, the girl returned it with a smile, saying: "How good you are!" And, bowing his head, he exhaled his last breath.

The miserable mother was present. He told me to warn; I came at once, and in her company I prayed near the angel she had just lost: I got up and said to her; "Great must be your unhappiness"—"Unhappiness? he answered me mildly. oh no! I suffer a great deal, yes, but I am glad to know that my daughter is with God."

An equal answer was also given to me by an unhappy father, who had just seen a handsome and excellent young man of twenty-two, who was the sole supporter of his old age, leave for good. "My heart cracks with pain," he said to me, suppressing sobs; but still, in the depths of my soul there is great joy: my son is saved! You know what he was to me; you know how much I loved him, how he loved me: well, if God wanted to restore it to me, he would not accept it. My son is saved, saved for all eternity! Everything else is worth nothing." And this worthy father added: "At least I have a great consolation in grief: I don't remember ever having set a single bad example to my son."

Go, all of you who have lost loved ones terribly, go weep at the feet of Jesus! Go to the King of heaven, in whose bosom you will one day find those you loved in the world. They have not died, although they are no longer here,

they are alive, more alive than those who survived them; he had lived eternal life, and that life no one will ever be able to take from him. It is the true life, of which the earth's life is only germ and preparation.

One day, perhaps very early, your turn will come, you will go to them; you will meet Jesus Christ again in the bosom of God. What mutual happiness! What hugs these hugs of eternity must be! In fact, in heaven we will recognize each other. We will love each other with the special love which, on earth, has united, purely and according to the will of God, our hearts: the child will love the father and the mother with a truly filial love; conjugal and fraternal love, friendship even, not disappearing in eternal life, on the contrary, they will be divinely perfected; from themselves imperfect, these feelings will become divinized, eternalized. Everything that proceeds from God is imperishable. How beautiful and wonderful it will be to love so perfectly in the infinite love of God!

Remember what the infallible oracles of revelation teach. "As for those who fall asleep in the Lord—says St. Paul—don't grieve because of him, like others who have no hope. Do we not believe that Jesus died and rose again? So God will bring those who with Jesus into heaven with Jesus Jesus died.... And we shall be with the Lord forever. Therefore comfort one another with these thoughts."

When St. John, enraptured in spirit, wrote the divine book of Revelation, he commanded an Angel to mark these words: "Blessed are the dead who are asleep in the Lord! Now rest from your labors; for your good works follow you. .

Finally, to the dismayed sister of her dear Lazarus, the eternal Son of God himself said: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me shall live, even after death. Whosoever liveth in me and believeth in me, he will not die for 'all eternity. Do you believe this?' added Jesus. And faithful Martha, falling down at his feet and in tears, answered him, "Yes, Lord; I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, that you came into this world."

And you, who also weep before a grave, do you believe what Martha believed? And if you believe, what good is faith to you? Believing is knowing. For that you know with infallible certainty, that the one so dear and so mourned by you, has only passed from the miserable earthly life to the eternal life which God reserves for his chosen ones; for no well-founded fear can darken that hope; for what do you know, that this dear one was saved, why despair? Why should you hear only nature's cry? As legitimate as it may be, COMPLY, since you are a Christian, may the omnipotent voice of God somehow envelop and stifle this heartbreaking cry.

At Jesus' feet, Martha and Mary weep: it is at Jesus' feet that the tears of all the afflicted must be shed. And just as lead becomes liquid and shiny in contact with fire; so too, in the presence of the divine Jesus, he will be transformed and sanctify your pain; it will change the travail into sweetness, the violence into tranquility and peace; rebellious before, it will become Christian afterwards, resigned, holy, edifying, meritorious.

In this way the Blessed Sacrament is for us in this valley of tears a living focus of divine consolation. Jesus Christ, veiled in the Eucharist, is the King of heaven dwelling on earth; it is like the center of heaven that descends, comes

to unite with us and draws us to itself. In him we unite, even in this world, with the loved ones who are no longer with us, but with Him and in Him in heaven.

When we wear mourning for a relative or friend, we go to the Communion table, near the altars. There, and not elsewhere, we will regain serenity and calm.

The more we are united with Jesus Christ, the more we will unite with them. Eucharistic Jesus is like a sun that projects rays to heaven and to earth: towards heaven, the rays are the Angels and the Saints; towards the earth are the faithful. With him we are all united, united, like all the spokes of a circumference that meet at the center. Without trying to console her, let us also have the greatest pity of the inconsolable pain of those who, having faith, come to die without sacraments, without signs of repentance, a relative, a friend, a child perhaps, who lived divorced from God. There is no possible consolation for such pains!

Those who do not have this consolation are worthy of the greatest pity, What else is left for them but a gloomy despair, which dulls their hearts and numbs all the powers of their souls?

And yet it is good to hope still against hope; it is good to pray, to beg, to groan, to have masses said, to apply the merit of alms: in fact, who can know what goes on between God and the soul at the supreme moment?

XXIV

INGRATITUDE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

They are naturally selfish men: most of the time, or rather, almost always, they only love us and look for them with the aim of their own interest. True love gives and gives itself; selfishness, which gladly usurps appearances and even the name of love, limits itself to receiving and bagging profits.

As long as we don't forget this sad truth, the heart always bleeds painfully in the face of ingratitude. The intensity of suffering is directly related to the strength of the love devoted to the ungrateful and the greater right we had to retribution.

At the same time, the ingratitude is grievous and unworthy: the heart that loves grieves; indignant the rebellious conscience.

An unhappy mother, recently widowed, was left with an only child, to whom from childhood she had devoted all her dedication and tenderness, which, at the age of 17 or 18, made all her happiness, was her only treasure. The young man was a Christian, intelligent, morigerated, he had received a careful education; everything seemed to augur a splendid future, when intriguing and envious relatives began to exert influence on the spiritless. He must have been very rich someday, and this mine was certainly intended to be exploited. They succeeded; to alienate him against the excellent mother; explored his love of money and independence; half doubts, fears about the management of his fortune insinuated in his mind; so much so that the unfortunate man went so far as to bear the most poignant offenses against

his mother. — "We have laws," he wrote to her; I've already consulted lawyers; I don't ignore the rights that assist me, etc."

He even talked about bailiff and process. And he hadn't even finished his studies yet!

The unfortunate lady's despair was extreme. "I cry day and night," he told me, "My son's heart is being stolen from me! He threatens me with lawsuits, he whom I thought was so good, so dedicated! My son, for whom I only live, the only person who I have for me in the world, suspects that I want to steal

this lady, fortunately, was a fervent Christian, very long experience had taught him that the Lord is for those who suffer.

Its new misfortune only served him to redouble his Every morning, in the countryside, where he lived, he walked almost a league, exposed to all the elements, in order to have the happiness of listening to mass and taking communion.

Like a bee laden with the precious spoil, she would enter the house refreshed with strength to spend the day. "I believe - he said - that if it were not for communion, I would die of grief."

How many children, when they grow up, even though they do not practice such excessively, become less extreme and ungrateful towards their parents! Do not many in the lower classes often treat aging parents with the greatest disregard, letting them know at every step that they are too much at home? If they don't reach the brutal extreme of beating them, the heart, that one, hurts every day.

How bitter tears have I seen shed an unmarried lady, whose three sons, as men, repaid her twenty-five or thirty years' dedication with the deepest indifference, if not even worse! Though she was virtuous and worthy of all respect, they treated her with disdain more grievous than injury itself; they took no notice of his most legitimate desires, even his orders. They often disregarded her at table, in the presence of the servants.

She didn't have an instant of joy; and when he couldn't hold back his tears, the ungrateful lifted their shoulders and spoke of their "bliss." — 'This was, my God, what I should expect from my children after having loved them so much! exclaimed the miser one day, hiding her face in her hands. How much I suffer! How disgraced I am!'

Ingratitude is a common fact in changes in fortune or position. I no longer refer to men sublimated in dignity who, yesterday in social frenzy, are now nothing; for them ingratitude is like daily bread; it is very trivial, it is almost an invariable law. I am referring only to those who cannot provide more services, who see themselves reduced to the condition of being loved for who they are and not in exchange for any personal interest. There are these, and more, opportunities to recognize the sting of these two words: ingratitude, disillusionment. Just yesterday, it was all fagueiro, everyone was melting in esteem and caresses: today nothing else; nothing else, save disappointments and poignant surprises. "When a man is rich—one of those victims of fortune told me a short while ago—he has friends everywhere; but these only sniff out the predicament of means, they slip away as if by magic.

People who had dinner at my house three years ago now turn their heads so they don't have to say hello. Only the one adversity has not changed.

It's painful!"

And in marriage, how many disappointments too. Before, everything was azure blue: then, everything is dark, there are continual storms falling down. The rose of happiness withers before our eyes; each day a leaf falls and after one or two years only the thorns remain.

"I only had three or four days of happiness," said one of those victims of illusion to my father. Very quickly I discovered that I had hitched up to the car of misfortune. My mean and gruff husband never knew what a condescension was. , it's tyrannical; on the pretext of demanding duties, it's annoying. I'm the most disgraced of women. If not for religion, I don't even know what I would do. below."

For her part, the husband also complains bitterly.

"In marriage—he repeats to anyone who wants to hear him—I was looking for happiness; I only found disappointment. My wife is crazy; she has no common sense. If I hadn't been a Christian, I would have already made some mistakes.

I knew an unfortunate girl, truly charming, dear to all, whose life when she was less than twenty-two years old was embittered by the heartless and honorless man to whom she had entrusted her fate. Very soon after getting married, she realized that she had given herself to a miserable man. He threw her out of the house together with a little boy, treating her as if he doesn't treat a servant; and when the poor lady, to protect her son's future, was forced to deal with the divorce, the wretch fled, carrying the whole fortune and leaving his wife and child almost in misery.

In her prime, with a broken heart, without hope or illusion, the little girl consoles herself only on her knees.

The Savior's adorable heart was also sated with that gall and vinegar. In the Garden of Agony, he was crushed under the weight of universal ingratitude: he not only had to bear the helplessness of all the disciples, of all the Apostles, of those who most tenderly should love him; not only did he find himself betrayed and given up by the man he had admitted to his divine intimacy; but beyond that, he saw us all; with our sins and ingratitude; he saw each one of us forgetting him, abandoning him for trifles, preferring him to the first pleasure, to the least interest, ashamed of him, returning his love with saddening indifference, making useless of the frightful pains of his sacrifice!

Ah! before the dying Jesus Christ, who will still dare to rebel against the ingratitude of men! What will be the ulcerated heart that, after having said and repeated: "My God, if it is possible, take this cup away from me!" don't immediately add with Jesus: "However, let yours be done and not my will?"

In this case, suffering is still like the seed thrown into the ground and containing the germ of a great tree. The suffering of the heart produces deep detachment from creatures and throws the soul entirely into the arms of

God. It takes away the sale of illusions: for better or worse, it shows life in its true aspect; it gives precocious, very useful, since it is a painful experience.

In short, suffering makes a Christian more Christian and puts him in a position to practice excellent virtues.

The danger of this ordeal is irritation, useless grief, thoughts of rancor and hatred against those who make us suffer. They must be forgiven, and instead of pitying ourselves, pitying them first. After all, isn't it better to be robbed rather than robber?

Let us drink to our feces the cup of pungent disillusionment, for God wills it so; Providence allows them in order to prove our fidelity and compel us to do penance.

XXV

HOW WE SHOULD PROCEED IN SPIRITUAL AND IMAGINATIONAL AFFLICTIONS

The spirit is as susceptible to suffering as the heart and body; nor because they are of the purely intellectual domain, do they leave spiritual afflictions to be less painful. True, the imagination does increase them, but they are as real as the spirit that suffers them.

They cover all the anxieties of doubt. Is there even something more painful, for example, than the situation of the father of the family, of the businessman who, engaged in difficult business, seeks in vain for some honorable suggestion to face up to his commitments, honor his firm, safeguard the family's future? Or what horrible anxiety is that of any superior, who is in charge of interests, honor, perhaps even the lives of his subordinates! that of the doctor who no longer knows what to do to save the patient and sees all the medicines fail! that of the father or mother who sees the position of their children and their own threatened by the misfortunes of a revolution, or by any other public calamity.

These sufferings are so real that they often degenerate into madness and end in the most tragic way.

The heart has an abundant part in them; but it is only by way of repercussion; these feathers reside in the spirit: they are truly spiritual feathers.

However, of all these anxieties, the religious doubt is perhaps the most poignant, since it penetrates even to the most intimate breasts of the soul. In fact, faith is the foundation of all Christian life. As faith is or is not true, so will the whole of life change direction! if faith is true, if one must believe in God, in Jesus Christ and in the Church, strength is to think, to proceed, etc., in a way that is not only different but diametrically opposed to the thoughts of other men, to their way of practicing and behaving. If faith is true, we must do penance on earth, that we only seek a very relative happiness there, that we sacrifice everything to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, to Catholic obedience; we must fight and mortify nature. If, on the contrary, faith is not true, it is reasonable that we only concern ourselves with the present tense, that we only seek our interest, satisfy our senses and our passions.

The opposition is as complete as that between day and night.

The unfortunate person who doubts is groping uncertainly as to the direction he has to give to life, to the whole of life.

Can you conceive of ordeal like this? It is necessary to walk, and the unfortunate person does not know which way to turn.

If the torment of doubt ever overtakes us, we must remain calm; it is just a war moth that has been known and traced for a long time. The old Serpent lashes out at us from all sides; sometimes against the heart; others against the senses; others (and this is our hypothesis) directly make the head the target of the poisonous barb.

So, if any temptation against faith should occur to you, it must not be forgotten, the question amounts to everything or nothing. Either there is a God Creator of the world and Jesus Christ is God in man and the Church is the Emissary of Jesus Christ, entrusted by Him to teach us infallibly and to save us: or else, there is no certainty of anything, mind you. : of nothing. We are no longer sure that two and two make four; that we exist; of which we have the right to reason, to affirm anything. On the other hand, we are all mad, with full rights to the asylum: wouldn't a man be truly mad if he seriously thought and said he didn't know that it exists, that two and two equal four, etc.?

It is, in fact, reason, logic and common sense that compel us to recognize that there is a Creator God and Lord of the world, that Jesus Christ is God in human nature, and that the Pope, head of the Church, is his Vicar and representative in the land. It is reasoning and not faith that brings these consequences, it is logic, inflexible logic.

Or should we renounce reason, logic and common sense, equating ourselves with madmen; or else, we must, kneeling before the Head of the Church, with all truths believe all the truths that he teaches us in the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of God.

Crazy or Catholic: there is no middle ground. Those who stop halfway are abdicating logic and therefore reason.

It was merciful Providence that placed us in this inevitable alternative: either we humbly and blindly believe everything that the infallible Church teaches the world in the name of Jesus Christ, from God; or else we refuse to believe and in that case be forced by the inexorable power of logic to descend from denial to denial to those ridiculous theories called pantheism and materialism, and ultimately to the final absurdity of the above-mentioned absolute doubt.

In this way faith is protected and protected by all the power of logic and common sense. So, there are two ends of the dilemma: the choice is forced: Either we will believe or we will crash into the absurd, the logical impossible. This must always be opposed to the pretensions of doubt.

It is also important to remember that faith is the child of light and purity; while doubts always come from more or less unseemly sources. They come from ignorance: we doubt because we do not know enough about the teaching of the Church and the luminous proofs of the faith. It comes from

pride; we do not want to subject the spirit to the authority of the Church, however infallible and divine, and we place our ideas before it, or rather our prejudices.

They come from the lightness that does not reason: how many empty heads doubt without knowing why they doubt! They still come from the passions; while we were pure in heart, we created without cost; as soon as he begins to lean towards evil, to practice it without remorse, we resort to doubt; and without our conscience being aware of it, it is certain that we only begin to doubt when we are riddled with bad yeast.

And, therefore, there are doubts born of ignorance, doubts born of pride, doubts that are born of unseemly passions.

There are still doubts that will join the pockets: we doubt the faith because it prohibits us from stealing and prescribes the restitution of thefts, — now we have stolen, we want to continue stealing and do not lend ourselves to restituting someone else's. This doubt is very tenacious. Her roots cling to the very bottom of the vault.

In short, doubts are children of selfishness, inertia, laxity: we don't want to be disturbed; Now, in order to serve Jesus Christ, we must continually renounce our own will, that we pray, that we confess, that we attend the Church and the sacraments, that we be meek, charitable, devoted, patient, etc. This is why we doubt it.

Sometimes we are the very cause of the doubts we complain about; we unscrupulously read harmful diaries, Protestant or ungodly books; we see perverting novels, or, what is the same thing, books that alter the acts and doctrines of the Church; we attend public lectures by improvised sages enemies of the faith; we form friendships with unbelievers; and other indiscretions of this suit. And after all this we are surprised to have doubts! It was more fitting that anyone who had caught rain in pots was surprised to be wet.

For doubts, as for any other ailments, the remedy is always the same: avoid occasions.

Whoever wants to keep the faith strong and pure, has to guard it by serious vigilance and the other is to nourish it; to fortify it by an entirely Christian life. Without prayers, without Holy Communion, without pious readings, without the attendance of the Church and priests, faith like any other grace cannot last for long.

If, in practical matters, serious doubts occur to you; seek without further ado for a good priest whose lights and charity you cannot doubt; expose your embarrassments to him with the greatest frankness and sincerity; and you will see how easily all these fogs will dissipate.

And then, no one can easily believe that there is a real doubt: in most cases, our doubts are only vague uncertainties, generated by the imagination and by the limited knowledge we possess about Catholic doctrine. This is no doubt: doubt properly speaking, is the reflected judgment of the intelligence, which after having maturely weighed the reasons for and against, decides that they are perfectly balanced.

In general, it matters in spiritual or imaginative pains that we make supreme efforts to keep ourselves at peace through prayer and purity of conscience. Neither the lights nor the correctness of decisions is conducive to disturbance of mind. Let us open up, if possible, with a trusted friend; let us advise each other; and with the grace of God, we shall belong to the number of those that Our Lord blessed, saying, "Blessed are the peaceable, for they shall be called children of God!"

However: I know, despite everything, that we are not able to remove the material cause of the anxieties concerning the above-mentioned interests of family, position, those of procedure, let us remember that, in the last analysis, we are not in this world so that at all let things succeed: for our part God only requires good will: he sees it, blesses it and will reward it eternally. The peace He promises and gives us is not what the world gives; it is not the peace of happy success, nor that of prosperity; it is the peace of conscience, the peace of faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ. will come in addition;" moreover, namely, the properties and fortunes of the land will be given to you in proportion to the most wise, just, paternal, and unfathomable Providence of God judging it opportune.

XXVI

OF THE LAST KIND OF SUFFERING, NAMELY, SCRUPLES AND DISORDERS OF CONSCIENCE

Consciousness being the practical rule of our soul as far as good and evil are concerned, any cloud that tarnishes it is enough to afflict. The more a man desires to do well, the more painful it is to ignore where the good is and where the evil, what is lawful and what is not. Such uncertainty, always more or less disturbing, is called scruple. The scrupulous are almost always excellent souls who sincerely detest evil and are afraid to do it; they fantasize evils that don't exist and their startled conscience lives in open struggle with the inspirations of their own judgment.

Reaching certain proportions, scruple seems to emphasize monomania, and how it has only one objective. In fact, I met an excellent young man, endowed with a good and cultivated intelligence, who had the time to repeat the sacramental penance over and over again. Once I was praying beside him in a chapel; there he was with his face hidden in his hands, stretched out like a bow. Such a moral situation is debasing; because man, in preference to everything, is a living will. I was told not long ago that one, repeating as best he could the acts of faith, hope and charity, which had naturally been given to him through penance. When he finished, he began again, accentuating the words more and more, and he said at least six or seven times on end: "A act of faith!... An act of faith!... An act of faith!..." The scruples had left him thin as a stick. Almost always, the scrupulous ones are thin; the inner turmoil undermines and consumes them.

Another: he was an excellent Religious who, one afternoon, after having confessed, entered a dimly lit chapel where I was adoring the Blessed Sacrament; the man entered without noticing me and also began to pray his penance, which apparently consisted of three Hail Marys.

The miser was sweating his topknot to carry out the three Hail Marys. He would inhale all the vowels, repeating from the bottom of his heart and with all the strength of his lungs all the words, members of entire sentences and sentences: !Have Ma-ri-ha... have-ve... have... Ma-ri-ha-gra-ti-ha, etc. Before he began to unravel the "benedictus" I had to withdraw, forced by a fit of laughter.

When I was in S. Sulpicio a young subdeacon ordained on the morning of that day, and therefore already obliged to recite the breviary every day, went to his director and told him; "Father, I am disturbed; I have just prayed vespers and complete with a fellow disciple; but I have had many distractions and I think it wise to start over." The director, who Já knew who he was dealing with, wanted to cure the penitent's scruples at first. Staring at him fixedly, I said to him, "Yes, start again." The penitent withdrew and returned a short time later. "Father, I'm still restless. I haven't prayed well for Vespers. I must start them again, no?" Undoubtedly — the old and experienced director answers with the greatest ease; they must be restarted." There was a second withdrawal and a second return. "What we still have, my friend."the director asks the scrupulous miser, who was red as a seal and had sparkling eyes and a scalding head. — Ah! my priest, even vespers! I am always afraid of failing my duty. However, I can no longer pray them: the time has come to say Matins and Lauds. - What to do! I'm despondent." "Well then, my son, don't you see," said the good priest, "you don't see that all your fears are absurd. Simple seat; pray the office as you can, more with your heart than with your head, and with all confidence; for you must deal with the merciful God. Forgive me the rather heavy lesson I gave you today, you must never forget it; and never, for whatever reason, restart the office. Have good will; the more Our Lord will supply."who was red as a seal and had sparkling eyes and a scalding head. — Ah! my priest, even vespers! I am always afraid of failing my duty. However, I can no longer pray them: the time has come to say Matins and Lauds. - What to do! I'm despondent." "Well then, my son, don't you see," the good priest told him then, "you don't see that all your fears are absurd. Simple seat; pray the office as you can, more with your heart than with your head, and with all confidence; for you must deal with the merciful God. Forgive me the rather heavy lesson I gave you today, you must never forget it; and never, for whatever reason, restart the office. Have good will; the more Our Lord will supply."I am always afraid of failing my duty. However, I can no longer pray them: the time has come to say Matins and Lauds. - What to do! I'm despondent." "Well then, my son, don't you see," the good priest told him then, "you don't see that all your fears are absurd. Simple seat; pray the office as you can, more with your heart than with your head, and with all confidence; because you must deal with the merciful God. Forgive me the rather heavy lesson I gave you today, you must never forget it; and never, for whatever reason, restart the office. Have good will; the

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The mania for always restarting vocal prayers, especially those of precept, is a stumbling block that is easily bumped into by scrupulous ones.

Another mortification that is also common to them is continual restlessness about the confessions they make. At all costs, they want to turn the past over.

They saw him and turned him from the inside out; and the more they do it, the more their ideas are shuffled; less calm they are. They resemble the silkworm that so turns and twists the thread that it ends up getting tangled up in it.

They are ever deliberately purposeful to make and re-make general confessions; when they absolutely cannot cling to some oblivion, they are grappling with contrition. "I didn't have enough contrition, nor perfect repentance for all my sins. Perhaps confession was not valid." The slightest omitted circumstance about some ancient sin, committed before the First Communion and when you can hardly commit serious sins, is enough to bewilder these poor brains, to disturb their piety, in fact very sincere and fervent, to deprive them of all joy in the service of God, to restlessly unrest them.

Someone told me that a poor lady, moved by this distressing pressure, had the courage, or rather the weakness, to return to the confessional five times in the same day. Unhappy penitent! Damned confessor! The scruple carried to such proportions constitutes a real danger not only for the soul but also for the body. Many godly souls have been turned away by this means of the service of Our Lord and the practices of godliness. In this way, sacred communion with specialty becomes a torment. I learned that a young man endowed with excellent sentiments of faith and dedication had decided to abandon the holy habit of frequent Communion, because he had not known how to overcome a scruple, which, moreover, was evidently absurd; believed and still believes, it seems, to commit sacrilege every time he takes

communion, because of alleged fragments of the Holy Eucharist, which, perhaps, certainly, in all probability, are evidently left to him, he says, nailed to his lips, the roof of his mouth or his teeth. He went so far as to see such fragments everywhere.

Under the specious pretext of following the dictates of conscience in everything, another young man, who was studying in Paris, reached the point where he could no longer work quietly for ten minutes at a time. He took all the chimeras that passed through his mind as inspirations of grace, which he had to follow; then he shuffled everything around, took, as it is commonly said, "the cloud for Juno" until at the end, bored, fed up with putting up with such an impossible situation, he decided to give up everything; and after having been faithful as an angel from his youth, he lived many months at a time entirely apart from God. The fever calmed, ashamed of what he had done, cursing the scruples that had caused the whole disaster, he returned to his former good habits and was, it is to be expected, cured forever.

Further, scruple sometimes leads. In Rome I met an artist with great talent, with an excellent life, who, solely because of ill-fated scruples, abandoned prayer and the sacraments.

Urging him to have a career, he replied in a tone that brought a kind of terror:

"That was never! I was very unhappy; and even though I know it was my fault and not religion, I have no heart to expose myself to new to these anguish". And, in fact, he remained in the deplorable state in which he found himself.

It is scruple a kind of unfounded dread. It is difficult for the scrupulous to reason: he understands, admits the truths that are told to him; and then, when we finish talking, he's in it, as if he hadn't heard anything.

In fact, experience demonstrates that for the scrupulous there is only one way of healing and salvation, only one: blind obedience to the confessor. Blind, it should be noted, without appeal or grievance, without any other reasoning than this. "My spiritual father in the name of God forbade me to do this, to think about that, to worry about this or that other thing; in the name of God he ordered me to do this or that: obey is all I have to do ; everything else is not my concern." The scrupulous person who proceeds in this way must, without fail, sooner or later will be cured. Obedience is always the mother of victory.

It is important that we beware of this almost general illusion in scrupulous minds: "My confessor does not know me well enough; he thinks me better than I really am. If I were sure I was perfectly known to him, I would have no trouble obeying him." Complies for this difficulty in the list of others. The confessor knows us well enough to guide us and knows us better than we know ourselves. If you didn't know us well enough, you wouldn't take to giving us the directions you give! And, therefore, we must obey him with a clear conscience; before God only this responsibility we contract.

Peace is to obedience as the pulp of a nut is to its casing.

XXVII

OF THE SUPREME SUFFERING THAT IS DEATH

It is death supreme suffering, because it is the supreme atonement for sin. The first sinner was told, "You shall die and be turned to dust."

In fact, according to God's primitive plan, man was immortal: after having lived on earth innocently, after reading himself sanctified by the constant practice of faith, hope, God's love, fraternal charity, prayer, from humility, he had to pass triumphantly from earth to heaven, probably as did Our Risen Lord on the day of Ascension. Man did not have to die, because he was adopted son of the living God.

Death and the agony that precedes it are therefore a punishment: we must make atonement, meritorious penance and a means of salvation. In this way, living faith and love will convert this evil into pure good. Accepting with a resigned heart an inevitable evil is of paramount importance in this as in all our other sufferings.

While we achieve health, we must often think about death, so that we freely offer the sacrifice of our lives to God and thus make these last battles worthwhile in which the soul, oppressed by disease, mad with pain, hardly knows what else to do and more often than not, it is not in possession of itself. Many people who were, as it is commonly said, two fingers away from death, later referred that, in such moments, the imagination had fixed itself on this or that object and that almost none of it was the sanctification of that supreme moment.

Among others, a lady who had fallen into the water, from which she was taken almost unconscious, told me what benefit she had gained from this experience. —"I'm going to drown; what a death it is! How painful it is to go with us little by little, out of breath!" And then my ideas were shuffled and I don't remember anything else." And yet this lady was very pious. "The lesson was fruitful," she added, "for ever since then I have prepared myself for death, lest I be picked up on the spot."

And, therefore, we must prepare ourselves holy to die.

There is nothing greater, nor more solemn: on death all eternity depends; "As man lives only once, he dies only once; and eternity is one: happy for those who die in a state of grace; unhappy and reprobate for those who do not die as Christians. On death everything depends. How carefully it matters that we prepare for it!

Now it is holy life that prepares death, that produces good death; and if this rule has any exceptions, they constitute miracles of mercy, and it would be unwise to count on them. Rare than one thinks are people who truly and sincerely convert at the last moment: in fact, fear is not regret; and the last sacraments received by a sick person more dead than alive often have no effect. Speaking of the good thief's penance, St. Augustine said to procrastinators: "There was always one, that you might not lose hope at all; but there was but one, that you might not become overconfident."

Let us therefore live Christianly; and particularly let us avoid the practice of any mortal sin: mortal sin is hell in seed, just as the state of grace is in

seed Paradise. In eternity sin is called hell, and grace is called the glory of heaven.

To keep ourselves in grace, let us pray assiduously; and let us never let a considerable lapse of time pass without confessing and communing. Let us commend our death every day to the Holy Virgin, and as we pray to the Hail Mary, let us think seriously of the words that serve as her final point: "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

As soon as we feel seriously ill, or just someone has the charity to make us understand the seriousness of our condition, let us immediately call the priest, without missing a single moment. In such cases the priest matters more than the doctor. A worthy family man, convalescing from a fit of apoplexy, spoke thus: "You, my lord vicar, are my true doctor, my first doctor; it is your care that I am used to claiming before all others."

The priest is the guardian angel of the dying. The rebellious angel, enemy of souls, does everything he can to remove this good angel from the bed of the sick,

He suggests to relatives, friends, servants these absurd thoughts, which have already lost so many thousands of souls and which are increasingly in vogue among the indifferent: "Don't send for the priest yet, so as not to frighten the sick person. It could hasten his death. The doctor strongly recommended that he not cause him emotions. When there is no more hope at all; when the patient begins to lose consciousness, then it will be time." And things like this are thought and said aloud, even within Christian families!

However, there is experience showing that, forty-nine times in fifty cases, the presence of the priest among the dying poor is equivalent to the presence of God himself. Very rarely do they fail to welcome you, grateful, happy, radiant with happiness.

A terrible day a railroad disaster had crushed and burned many passengers; to one of the priests who was taking care of the victims, someone came to prevent a young student from the Polytechnic School being transported to a house in the neighborhood. The priest ran to this house, where he was rudely refused entry. He insisted: they persisted in refusing. "It's not a small thing that he suffers," said the compassionate mistress of the house. Why disturb him further and fatigue him? Fortunately, the priest had once been a professor at the Polytechnic School. Thanks to that title, he managed to make the foolish woman at least tell the dying man that he was there. Having accompanied the woman, he entered, and soon, even before he had been announced, he saw, moved, that the poor boy had stretched out his arms to him, and through gestures he showed (because he could no longer speak) how much joy the presence of a priest made him. He confessed through gestures, received the last consolations of faith, and half an hour later calmly expired, waving his crucifix.

This is true of almost all patients.

Error and folly is to suppose that they are afraid of the priest; and to repel the priest who approaches them is a sacrilegious attempt, it is a crime that, despite being unqualified, is still irreparable.

No one should be afraid of Extreme Unction either.

If it is a sacrament of the dying, it is not a sacrament of the dead; instead of making people die, they make people live: sometimes when there is a spiritual use in it, they restore health to the body; it always fills the soul with the last graces which, in the case of death, help it to pass holy from mortal to immortal life. In places where there is a living faith, Extreme Unction and the Sacred Viaticum are received and requests only if any serious illness is manifested; and again and again great blessings are the reward of that faithfulness.

Let us sanctify beforehand our agony and our last breath, uniting them with the greatest spontaneity to the agony and last breath of our divine Saviour.

He, who was infinite happiness and omnipotence itself, wanted to suffer in his humanity not only agony but also death, so that in the supreme bid, which had so much influenced our salvation, he might serve as our encouragement. What Christian will not magnanimously accept the pangs of his own agony, thinking of the agonies of his God in the cave of Gethsemane, and then during the mortal hours of Calvary? How can Christians not accept the lacerating pains and humiliation of death, thinking of the Son of God who expired in the unspeakable tortures of the cross?

And in this way, he is Jesus to the end, to the threshold of eternity, the Comforter of those who are faithful to him, he is strength, hope, joy, life and their most faithful Savior.

"I didn't think it would be so good to die!" murmured, agonized and with a smile on his lips, the famous Fr. Suarez, of the Society of Jesus. I was fortunate to hear almost identical words, uttered five or six hours before the last breath, by a Religious of the Visitation. After a long and terrible illness which had just cleansed her soul, she had, almost in the throes of death, such calm and serenity as to arouse her own admiration. "I don't know what this is," she said to me with extreme candor; I don't suffer at all anymore; I haven't felt so well for a long time. And putting his emaciated hands, he added mildly: "Oh, how good it is to die!"; and seeing one of the sisters weeping near the bed, he said to her; "It's not worth crying, my sister; I feel happy dying. And so do you, my dear sister, you will never be afraid to die; always remember this: it is very good to die!" The well-articulated last word that those innocent lips uttered was like the summary of her entire life; about a quarter of an hour before she expired, she said in a distinct and clear voice: "Jesus, my love!" I wish we would die like that!

XXVIII

WHY THERE ARE SO MANY MODES OF SUFFERING

Anyone who knows a little about the mystery of suffering will easily understand why man suffers in this world in so many ways. Why do we suffer? Because we are sinners. Now we are sinners both in body and in soul: everything in us more or less participates in sin; the spirit, the imagination, the heart, the will, the senses, the body, the organs, everything is more or less infected with the subtle poison of sin. And as suffering is both a punishment and atonement for sin, it must be able to encompass all of this, to penetrate everywhere.

Otherwise divine justice would fail, and the work of our purification and sanctification could not be finished on earth.

This is why we suffer in this world; this is why we must really be able to suffer in so many ways, and both in soul and in body. There is a mixture of justice and mercy at the same time.

In general, suffering and sin can be compared to the ray of light and the prism upon which it falls; across it the ray divides into many colors; it is always the same and only ray, but appears on the other side of the prism tinted with the following colors; — blue, green, yellow, orange, red, purple and indigo. The ray emanating from the sun of divine holiness is suffering, the general penance of sin; the prism is the sinner; and each shade of the ray of justice that traverses and penetrates the sinner is the diverse variety of sufferings: it is the suffering that punishes and purifies each faculty and corresponds to the different gradations of sin, for example, pride, indifference, selfishness, greed, laxness of mind, laziness, lust, gluttony.

That's why there is suffering of all kinds: for the same reason that there are punishments in the penal code for all crimes and crimes, and in pharmacies there are different medicines for all diseases.

Each of these special sufferings, when properly borne, becomes a special source of eternal bliss: each one in particular becomes a most marked grace and will be like a beautiful flower that will adorn our crown of glory in Paradise. The fragrance of these manifold flowers and the magnificent reward of the sufferings of the elect on earth will intoxicate heaven with perfumes.

Let us suffer, therefore, courageously, let us suffer joyfully, thinking of eternity.

XXIX

ON HOW PRAYER IS THE COMFORT OF THE SUFFERING

To pray is to think of God, to adore him, to give him thanks, to beg Him for forgiveness or assistance; it is to unite man inwardly with Jesus Christ. Now, since Our Lord, as has been said, the Supreme Comforter of man in this world, it follows that prayer is the most direct and at the same time the simplest means of putting ourselves in contact with the Comforter; or, on the other hand, it is the simplest and most direct means of being comforted. Prayer and consolation: these two words are almost synonymous.

If, when we suffer, we do not find in prayer the treasure of consolation it contains, it is because we trust in asking for only one thing, namely, exemption from the cross. Prayer in this case is just the cry of selfishness; it is wholly impregnated with our love; and even more often than not this selfish love is absolutely blind. The principle is this: "I suffer; now I don't want to suffer, therefore, Lord, if you love me, if you are good, just, powerful, if you are busy with my person, deliver me now and now, etc." And this is called praying!

Nor does the idea that suffering is an inevitable consequence of sin in general and of the innumerable guilts committed by us personally does not reach our minds; And the cross sent by God to call us to reflection, to

penance, to the thought of eternity, as if to compel us to restore Christian practices that we should not have abandoned; it is the cross, therefore, great and very great grace and remedy of mercy; but that doesn't matter, what we want, what we stubbornly ask God is to deliver us as soon as possible before the tribulation.

"But, son, — Our Lord tells us speaking through the lips of a priest or through the 'intermediate of a good book — if your prayer were granted, you would immediately relapse into your old content of life, into your vanities, indifference and habits criminals." We respond to nothing, and we continue to insist on asking God to deliver us from the cross we suffered.

But," continues Our Lord, "it is precisely to deliver you from evil, from true evil that I submit you to this ordeal. Do you have a greater regard for the body than the soul? the transitory evil, than the great evil that lasts forever?" And we repeat the invariable refrain: —"Deliver me, Lord, from this cross. "But, my son, this suffering is your Paradise; it is an abundant source of merits for you to reach heaven. What have you done until today? Is it not time for you to take effective care of the eternity that awaits you?" And we remain earnestly bowed to the earth; we only attend to the present moment, and we only know how to pray to ask for what the very goodness and mercy of Our Lord must not grant us.

One day I was in a hospital for the incurable, walking from cot to cot. I approached an old woman who, after having lived, apparently, more than lightly, found herself in the extreme, not only because of paralysis, but also as a result. of blindness, of retreating to this hospital. To all the cheery words I spoke to her, her whining, silly answer was invariably this: "I would like to see this! I would like to see clearly what this is like!" It couldn't go from here. That is why the unfortunate woman was also a source of consolation in her painful illness. — This is how many suffering people practice: they pray extravagantly; they forget that they are Christians, that Jesus Christ was crucified, that there is an eternal life that they must deserve, an eternal hell too, and a terrible Purgatory that they must avoid.

And prayer is an inexhaustible source of peace, strength, happiness, when man prays as he should pray, when, entrusting himself to the Providence of God, he worships him with love and fervently. True prayer always consoles: it redounds to the soul in an increase of divine lights that let it understand the advantages of the cross, and how much happiness goes into expiating the sins made in this world. Prayer inwardly unites the faithful with Jesus Christ, who is the beginning of infinite joy.

Pray in this way and you will see. Your faith will grow with prayer, and also with faith your patience will be strengthened; and if you ask God for relief in your trials, you will do it in full conformity with the divine will, a virtue of which Our Lord wanted to give us an example in the Garden of Olives, "My God, if this cup cannot pass without me Drink it, yours and not my will be done! How many sufferings have been sanctified, deified by this ineffable prayer!

In acute pain, it is necessary to give hand to the many vocal prayers. It is enough for the patient to keep his heart well united to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and thus suffer with his Savior as holy and patiently as possible. Jesus said almost nothing during the long hours of the Passion. It is timely to

repeat ejaculations like these: "My God, I offer you my sufferings—Jesus, I love You.—Jesus, have mercy on me. Holy Virgin, bless me : Or it is enough simply to repeat the holy names of Jesus and Mary.

One day I was fortunate enough to approach the bed of pain of a holy priest who, as a young man, was about to die of a terrible disease of the spine. Horrible and continued must be his ailments, according to the doctors. But he spoke little and thought only of his divine Master. Many times a minute they heard him only say, or rather murmur, his voice filled with love and suffering; "Jesus!....Jesus!" What a magnificent prayer this is! Invoked in this way, the sacred name of Jesus is an excellent act of faith, hope, charity and contrition.

A saint could not one day pray her rosary because she had a lot of headaches. Lying almost motionless on the bed, and not having the strength to do it anymore, she had the comfort of saying: "Mary, I salute you" as she passed the beads. At the end, radiant appeared to him the Blessed Virgin and was pleased to tell you "My daughter, the supplies love all;. And so short acceptance deserved me your and simple greetings, as if you had prayed the whole rosary, as you usually

From Indeed, God attends more to the heart than to the lips. Let us pray with living faith and humble trust; let us lift up our sorrowful soul to how beautiful that suffering is preparing for it; and Our Lord, faithful in His promises, will meet us always in prayer strength, light, comfort and therefore consolation.

XXX

BECAUSE CONFESSION IS ALSO COMFORT

The reason, here is it: because pure hearts possess God, and God is such a treasure that, when possessed, all tribulations, however great, lose a great part of their bitterness. Now confession, which is a second baptism, is the sacrament bequeathed to men by divine mercy so that they can regain purity of heart.

No matter how great and how abominable the guilts, of which suffering is just punishment, the holy confession has the gift of erasing them, just as the ocean can receive, absorb and submerge in its bosom the waters of all the rivers of the Earth. Confession is the shoreless and endless ocean of God's mercy, who, through repentance, forgives everything and always.

How great and worthy of God!

Confession at the same time invests against sin and softens the pain of suffering, the fruit of sin. Healing the conscience restores peace, which, although it is not free from suffering, is nevertheless peace, it is what the world cannot give. The confessed and acquitted sinner is like the slave restored to freedom and who sees his fetters broken: what shudders of joy as he regains his freedom! He is a resurrected dead: what an intimate joy, more divine than human, in this new life in which the soul becomes intoxicated after having lost it for a long time! Confession is the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and, surrounded by forgiveness, it is heaven that opens again, it is the hope and the prelibar of a happiness that will never end.

How pitiful is the situation of the unfortunate person who suffers and does not have the comfort of finding God in his heart!

In fact, there is something prodigious in the singular obstinacy with which the unhappy, poor, sick, imprisoned, afflicted, victims crushed by the weight of pain, refuse the benefit of confession. True, even amidst sufferings pride reigns, like an inner devil, like a rebel who refuses to bow his head and say, "I have sinned"; but it seems impossible that this cry of self-love will not be lost in the void of the guilty soul, a horrible void that only Jesus Christ can fill.

It is understood that the happy of the world, in the intoxication of pleasure and wealth, forget about God and their conscience; but as for the unfortunate, it is inconceivable that they can do without God. It seems that all the poor, all those who suffer, without exception and during all hours of the day, should surround the confessionals, consider the priests salvation and refuge, and seek them with a commitment ten times greater than that of the most zealous these priests employ in going after sinners. But, it's hard to say, it's exactly the opposite that happens, And why?

This is one of the most detestable tricks of the devil, who likewise robs the wretched of the happiness of time and eternity.

Is there anything more delightful than peace? Go, then, and look for her where she is, you who are bent over with so much pain. Go and purify your soul so that God may enter it. The joys of peace of conscience are so profound! "I have never been so happy in my life—a poor sinner who had just received absolution told me one day between sobs. Remorse haunted me. Here I am at last unburdened and freed from it!"

"Oh! how good is confession! exclaimed another sinner, who was a young student endowed with intelligence and heart; how good is confession! What would I do without it?"

And you too, whoever you are, go, go drown your pains in the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, who washes souls in the sacrament of Penance! Go without fear and without delay. After being purified, a profound change will take place in you, and in the pure joys of conscience you will drink a supernatural force, the existence of which you do not suspect.

Who is pure knows how to suffer; Now, in knowing how to suffer consists the whole science of life.

XXXI

WHY SO HELPFUL him communicate OFTEN THAT SUFFERING

The more a man works, the more he needs to recover his strength; now, to regain strength, you must eat. Strictly speaking: "to acquire strength" is equivalent to this other expression "to eat." The laws of bodily life are symbolic of the laws of the soul's life: for the soul, breathing means — praying; washing is equivalent to confessing; feeding is the same as communing. It was precisely because Communion is the pabulum of the soul, the heavenly Bread of the Christian, that Our Lord instituted it in the form of food: since in fact, in Holy Communion, we receive Jesus Christ Himself,

eternally alive; as he reigns in heaven, however, we receive him in the form of food, under the appearance of bread. It's not bread: it's Jesus Christ; but it is Jesus Christ, Bread of life, supernatural food for the children of God in this world.

In the Gospel, he himself took this name, announcing to his disciples the mystery of the Eucharist, which he was later to institute on Holy Thursday in the Upper Room. "I am - said - the living bread come down from heaven I am the bread of life;... And my flesh is the bread that I will give for the life of the world Yes, my flesh is real food and my true drink blood

One who eat my flesh and drink my blood, abide in me, and I in him!" The Eucharist is, therefore, the living Bread of the Christian, the Bread that nourishes souls and preserves them for eternal life.

What food is for the body, communion is for the soul; the soul that does not commune is like a body that ceased to eat, If we stopped eating, what would become of us? We would be victims of rapid starvation: goodbye strength, vigor and health; not only could we no longer work or walk, but in a little while we could not even stand; within a few days death would be inevitable.

Such is the Christian without the Eucharistic pabulum: when he does not receive enough communion, he gradually loses spiritual strength; faith declines and becomes dull; hand thinks more about the things of heaven; loses the taste of prayer; you truly no longer love Our Lord; good manners quickly degenerate, and he ends up crashing into mortal sin, into the habit of mortal sin. In other words, the soul declines and dies.

If this is so for everyone, what will it not be for the miserable sick, the afflicted, the victims of misfortune? They have these needs for a double degree of strength, for, in addition to the common burden of life, they have yet another cross to carry and sometimes a very heavy cross. There are times in life when man needs to possess an almost heroic virtue to fulfill the will of God and not succumb to the weight of the pains it imposes on him.

Without the assistance of a most special grace, man cannot bear certain heart-rending and soul-rending tortures, some extreme hardships, some physical pains; Now, this grace, not to be given, but to be received, presupposes the existence of a very solid Christian preparation: lacking which, divine grace necessarily loses its effectiveness and leaves us in tight trances, and overwhelmed by a probation greater than the our forces, So we succumb, but our fault; we would stand and win if we were what we should have been.

What is the secret of this former fidelity, which prepares the soul for great combat? It is the usual, serious, fervent frequency of holy communion.

The insistence on this truth, so obscured in France by Jansenism, and yet so proclaimed in all tones by the Church, the Pope and the Saints, will never be excessive.

In fact, what constitutes true Christians is fellowship, frequent fellowship. It develops and strengthens the spiritual temperament, to a greater extent than the habit of good eating strengthens the temperament and health of the body. Is it believable that the martyrs would have endured, as they do,

horrible ordeals, if until then they had lived as so many indifferent Christians live, how are you perhaps, reader? if they had not applied themselves for a long time to prayer, mortification, adoration and the very frequent reception of the divine sacrament of the Eucharist? Great illusion would feed whoever believed in such; they were heroic in the big trials that's why they had been brave in the small ones. They remained firm, unshakeable in Jesus Christ, on the day of the great struggle, because, in the course of life, that is, in the daily struggles, they had remained most faithful to this same Jesus and had conscientiously practiced that rule of his Gospel: "Abide in me and I will abide in you."

Patience in great and small adversities depends on the fervent and frequent practice of communion. Communion is like a rich piggy bank which at the same time contains valuable gold coins for large expenses, and a large portion of silver coins of all kinds for daily expenses. Opulence is to possess it, and the most impoverished person is anyone who does not have it. And the Church gives this rich piggy bank free of charge to those of her children who ask for it. Or rather, no, she doesn't give it away for free; for in return he demands of us more precious value, namely, our good will, the firm, and more than firm purpose, to be ever more faithful to God. On this fidelity depend the effectiveness of holy communion and the great fruits of patience that we can derive from it, that is, humility and gentleness during suffering.

And therefore, sick, sick, you often receive Communion Jesus in his sacrament is the best physician and the mildest medicine. "I did not come," he said, "to those who achieve health, but to those who are sick." He seeks you, comes to your house, as he once approached the sick, the paralyzed, the blind and the lepers; a virtue always emanates from Him, as the Gospel expresses itself; and what virtue is this, if not the peace and grace which he bears, so that for his sake you may holy suffer? So great are the consolations produced by communion in the miserable sick that they often momentarily forget the pains. "On the days when I take communion—an unfortunate victim of a very rude ordeal told me a short time ago—in those days it seems to me that I don't suffer anymore." When even the suffering does not cease, the Christian who takes Communion is aware of a blank spot against discouragement and impatience.

And the poor! Do they not come across in the Eucharist the treasure of treasures and the wealth of the Angels? How is it possible that a poor person, who has faith, is not willing to take communion at least every Sunday and Holy Day? Like illness, poverty is in itself an excellent preparation for communion: Jesus loves the poor so much! So great is the tenderness and compassion that your Sacred Heart nurtures for all those who cry!

And don't even say the poor man: "I am so ignorant; I only know how to read; work robs me of all the time. And then I am so badly dressed! I dare not present myself thus at the Holy Table." All this would have fit perfectly if our Lord were like the kings of the earth; but, fortunately, He judges in a very different way: before Him, ignorant is he who does not know Him; unworthy, one who does not love him; despicable and ragamuffin is the one whose soul is covered with guilt, the one who dares to present himself to her without being clothed with the nuptial mantle of grace. And it's almost always very easy to take Communion early, or else in some little chapel, where we and our costume, however bad it may be, will pass perfectly unnoticed. For

reasons of this, no one deprives himself of the ineffable comfort of communion. If the interior is in good condition, nothing too much concern with the outside. Be clean: that's enough.

What shall I say to the embittered hearts that seem to have lost everything in front of a still poorly closed tomb? May they also go to the source of all comfort, all peace, all strength. Let them share without fear: in the face of God's goodness, tears are a valuable recommendation. Jesus could not see crying without being moved; he sees the unhappy widow of Nain, who was attending the funeral of her only son, crying, and immediately tells him: "Weep not." He sees Lazarus' two sisters sobbing at his feet, he sees the tears of his relatives and friends; and cannot withhold these words of comfort and hope: "Your brother shall rise." So also from the bosom of his Tabernacle He says to anguished souls: Weep not thus; come to me and look to heaven! The trembling being, whose loss tears your heart, is with me.

The time for your call will also come. Until she arrives, live in me, feed yourselves with my flesh and my blood, and come and drink in me the hope of eternal life."

When we lose a loved one, let us commune for their intention, not once, but many times, as often as possible. To console St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, who had just learned of the death of her young brother, Our Lord deigned to declare to her that the most effective means of alleviating at first and finally freeing this soul so dearly loved was to offer by her intention many consecutive communions. And asking the servant of God how many communions she should make for this intention, Our Lord ordered her to take communion a hundred and thirteen times; and that thereafter his brother's soul would enter into eternal rest, fervently began and carried out the sweet and cherished task, and indeed, on the day he finished it, his brother appeared to him, radiant and resplendent, thanking him. the charity he had had and announcing to him that, thanks to her, he had been admitted to the mansion of the Chosen.

A poor mother had lost a shudderingly beloved 17-year-old son. Although resigned in the depths of her soul by such a fate, she had allowed herself to be enslaved by the pain that, out of sheer discouragement, she had almost abandoned her pious habits; her son had died three months before and she had not taken communion after that. What I did was cry, cry night and day, and go to the cemetery.

One night God allowed her son to appear to her in a dream: she saw him very sad; his body, clothes and hair looked wet as if he had come out of water. "Are you, my son?" exclaims the poor woman, extending her arms to him. "Where do you come from? Why are you so wet? , who left me like this; but they run uselessly over me, for you are not careful to impregnate them. They will only give me relief, they will only take me to heaven after you sanctify them by prayer, fervor and by attending the sacraments of the Church."

The miserable mother took advantage of the lesson and drank, for her own benefit and that of her son, the treasures of salvation contained in the divine Eucharist. In fact, in these painful circumstances, communion has the double advantage of pouring the balm of peace not only on the afflicted one who communes, but also on the deceased for whose intention it communes.

In all our tribulations we go to Jesus, let us take tireless refuge in the Blessed Sacrament.

XXXII

HOW FUTILE AND VAIN ARE WORLD CONSOLATIONS

Suffering is the touchstone that makes it possible to discern the real gold from the tinsel: the tinsel is the world; gold is the religion, the Church.

In the preceding chapters, the omnipotence of Religion to console all sufferings was evidenced. The world wants to console too; let's do the parallel and each one decides later.

I find myself seriously ill; my sufferings are horrible; the doctors, poor things, have already unsuccessfully tried the effectiveness of three, four, five medications. "Animo! the world tells me; this will pass." Cheer? It's easy to give advice; but where shall I get my courage? I am discouraged; I can no longer...

"This will pass." — Well then, what if my passing happens before... And then, if this doesn't pass?...

After all, who authorized you to say that my illness will pass? These are sadistic and trivial nonsense.

— 'Console yourselves, poor friend; I too had this disease.' And is this called consolation? Where is the alleviation of suffering here?

— 'Send for another doctor: perhaps he will cure you.'

Doctors? Poor things! they do what they can, but they can do little. Sancho is no more capable of healing than Martinho. In this regard, it is worth repeating what Francisco already said about female volubility: "A fool is one who trusts!" If medicine will bring me consolation, I will have time to wait and despair.

—"Come on! You have to be a man!" Well yes; I am a man, and a man who suffers horribly and asks you for what you do not give him, which is why you cannot give him, which is nothing more or less than this: resignation, hope, peace, patience.

One day, in Rome, I was in the company of an excellent prelate, who could not get out of bed as a result of his most painful and very dangerous illness, when one of our mutual friends, army chaplain and a little too used to it, came in. deal with soldiers. "Well then, my rich lord," he said to the wretched sick man, who could no longer with him, "how is it going today? Better, isn't it? This won't be anything; it will pass." The sick man, who was quite eccentric and looming, looking at him, half compassionate and angry, said to him: "Have you no other consolations to give me? Those are for corporals. Go away, you bother me. I pity those who only know how to console with trivialities." Hearing such impatience, we all burst out laughing, and the poor Prelate could not help laughing too.

However, nothing is truer: the world only knows how to give sadistic and trivial consolations to the afflicted.

He is so aware of this that he often does not even dare to venture any attempt in this regard. These words of customary sympathy—"I'm sorry for my part." uttered in a conventional tone and accompanied by a handshake leave the man alone and alone with all his sadness.

I once heard an old man without faith comfort a poor fellow who had just lost his mother. Here's the best concept he could pull out of his incredulous heart: "What do you want, my dear," he said, slurring two or three sighs, "what do you want!... One day you'll die. It's nature's law..." And after a short silence, he continued like this: "Poor woman! poor woman! She was still so good after eight days:" What a great consolation that was!

Faced with the corpse of a young military officer who had just died and in the presence of the deceased's family, a friend, an officer too, was even less sentimental: if you go on like this, you will certainly be sick. Poor devil! He was an excellent man all the same."

Here is the mold of the consolations we receive. It is not that affection, purely human friendship, does not console the heart in the works of life; but when man can count on it, he doesn't count on much. As long as it is a question of dancing, laughing and singing, the world is wonderfully satisfying; his mirage, however, vanishes like a soap bubble, only man starts at the heart of the realities of life. Anyone who has only that, has nothing else, is alone; Well, we have already said this and by God Himself it was said in the Holy Scriptures: "Go alone! Woe to the one who is alone!" The worldly man is alone only if he sees the cross, the Christian, but he is never alone; Jesus Christ is with him, is in him; and there is none who can deprive him of that eternal, heavenly, and adored comforter.

This, which is true in relation to physical sufferings, infirmities and heartaches, perhaps goes up a notch when it comes to poverty: the essentially selfish and frivolous world flees as far as it can from the indigent; and when he cannot avoid it at all, he disposes of him as quickly as he can, not giving him alms, but throwing him some money. Charity is divine, it is a daughter of Jesus Christ and alien to the world, which knows only insipid philanthropy and believes that a charity fund more or less regularly administered is enough for the comfort of the unfortunate. It ignores that in poverty the heart suffers even more than the body, and that if it is indispensable to give bread, firewood and clothing to the indigent, this is only the smallest part of the fraternal assistance he expects from us.

Affection, dedication, almost respect, this is what is needed to console him, to restore his courage. Only the heart knows how to speak to the heart; the soul only knows how to speak to the soul. This is why only Religion consoles and revives the poor.

Emptied of Jesus Christ, the world is in the face of all sufferings the same as a dry fountain in the face of a traveler burning with thirst. Those who offer the world's consolations to the afflicted are like those who with sand intended to quench their thirst.

XXXIII

OF THE DESERTY OF THOSE WHO SUFFER AND PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE CHURCH

Without God, without Jesus Christ, it is fair to ask, what are the victims of true suffering reduced to? Apparently, there are five suggestions that they can embrace, all equally nonsensical and criminal: either they tried to stun themselves into a kind of artificial life, all of imagination, out of reality; or they will give in to pusillanimous, loose and demeaning melancholy; or they will persevere proudly and coldly in this apparent indifference, which is called stoicism; or they will be driven from defeat by rage and despair; or finally, they will commit an irremissible crime, the horrible, the infamous suicide. Anyone who is not a Christian and suffers seriously finds himself prostrate in an alley with these five sad exits, which more or less directly lead to hell.

The most common of all is the first, where frivolous men enter foolishly and with greater recklessness.

According to the consecrated phrase, they seek to "distract themselves". There are some who look for distractions even in the most ignoble vices, in drunkenness, for example. In Paris I met a young businessman, who until the age of twenty-five had lived exemplarily. An unhappy marriage, a disastrous break, so bewildered him that he wanted at all costs to be stunned and threw himself into drinking. A man who a few years before had been so industrious, restrained and modest, staggered through the streets in complete intoxication, swearing and smeared his lips with the greatest obscenities. He had suffered and had not known how to invoke the help of the Religion.

One of the most famous poets of this century had the misfortune, at the beginning of his career, to find wicked friends, who initiated him into the most impious ideas and readings. Having as his only religious instruction some detached passages of the catechism, erased memories of the time of his First Communion, he lost his faith little by little; and when he found himself without God and without hope, such were the anguishes of his spirit that he also tried to drown them. One of his friends told me, who often found him in such a state that he seemed as if he were brutish and stupid. He died in great intellectual decline, and left in famous verses the expression of the anguish that had lost him.

Other times, if this is possible, and when he has the misfortune of being rich and not belonging to Jesus Christ, it is simply in frivolities, in giving to the blunder and in criminal pleasures, that man seeks to soothe his sorrows. This is gilding and covering the cross with flowers, but it always exists, hard and crushing. Suffering and laughter is madness that ordinarily accumulates sins upon sins and loses souls.

The second way out for the man who suffers and who is not a Christian is the low spirit, a choice in which low energy characters easily overwhelm. Not having a Cyrenæus to help them carry the cross of misfortune, their strength dies, they let themselves fall to the ground, they become discouraged and here they are, despondent, without energy, like the cow that kneels and falls to the blow of the butcher.

Such a moral situation is demeaning; because man, in preference to everything, is a living will. I was told not long ago that a young, honest and estimable by the yardstick of the world, but devoid of religious sentiments, he considered himself extremely happy because he had just fulfilled the golden dream of his entire life: a marriage of affection. Almost exactly a year later, his wife died in his arms. "It's been twenty years now," added the person who told me about it; and the unfortunate man is as desperate and dejected as he was on the first day. He doesn't do anything, he has no occupation; ." If this bastard had been a Christian, how his life would have changed! Certainly the pain he felt, so justifiable, would have been immense and to some extent inconsolable; but it would have been at first softened and then sanctified by faith and prayer; Not thus annihilated all his faculties; and mainly, it would have been fruitful in merit for eternity. What good is this prolonged agony?

Suffered, suffers ten times more; and useless is all that. What a disgrace! What madness!

Others, energetic but proud characters dress with apparent insensitivity and pretend to drag suffering. This would be called the patience of pride.

A famous conventional Freemason and Voltairean was about to die. His wife and daughter, both pious as two angels, were treating him and unraveling in care and futile efforts to convert him at this supreme moment. They said to him, in tears: "Religion would inspire you with such strength! — Leave me," the dying man replied dryly. , the religion of pride." And expired.

In fact, this stoicism, this stronghold of affectation, is the religion of pride, that is, of Satan. Dispose of many more souls than bewilderment and faintheartedness. It gives, it is undeniable, a certain boldness of display, more artificial than real; but many bad passions find shelter under this crust of insensitivity, and a shelter all the more secure the harder the crust. There is also complete madness in this; it is a lie, for why should man say that he does not suffer when he suffers? Why deny suffering?

To deny it, does it matter to suppress it, or even to alleviate its bitterness? To put a dose of pride on him is to make him more than very sinful and nothing more.

A worker from Paris, who in the atmosphere of the capital grid had breathed that insolence that respects nothing and mocks everything, one day broke his leg and had to have his thigh amputated.

Less out of courage than out of bravado, he refused the chloroform that the operator had advised him; and during the operation, which was long and complicated, he pretended to smoke.

When the aide set aside the amputated limb, the proud patient staring impassively at the severed leg, said, alluding to the phrase adopted in the pasture houses, this ungentle joke: "Boy, take the beef." "Would you have suffered a great deal during that horrible operation?" "asked his poor mother, who had come to see him a few hours later—No, not at all—answered him harshly. Does a Parisian suffer?"

Such courage is nothing but brutality. The kind of energy it supposes is of low origin; it is pure animal impulse. Those who have nothing else are well to be pitied.

Fury and despair is the fourth character that takes suffering apart from faith. I was once watching an unhappy ten-year-old girl who was about to die of pleurisy. The mother, who had the misfortune of not being a Christian, unable to fight and overcome the disease that robbed her of her daughter, began to scream and howl with despair; she ran all over the house like a madwoman, slamming into doors and walls, pulling her hair out with both hands, and finally rolling on the floor.

It was a ghastly spectacle. "God is evil," he exclaimed. Why does he take my daughter from me? My daughter is mine and his. Wanting the daughter to prevent her from blaspheming in this way, she bit her hand.

Even though they also feel vividly, those who are Christians do not allow the follies of passion to poison their pain. Always deadly to the soul, this poison is often deadly to the body as well.

Woods; drives to suicide.

Suicide is the inculcated decisive remedy that the devil presents to those who, not understanding the mystery of suffering, want at all costs to get rid of it. "Put an end to existence," he whispers to them under his breath.

Because the perfidious does not add either: And will you see later what happens to you? "Ah!" is that he knows it, he knows too much.

In fact, it is easy to end existence; it is the work of a few moments; yes, but how to end eternity? The man who kills himself to stop suffering is not only a criminal, who violates the divine law, who has a good that does not belong to him, but to God alone, is still horribly foolish, three times mad, who to avoid an essentially transitory suffering, always softened in a thousand ways, easily remedied, rushes recklessly into the horrible and eternal sufferings of hell. What would be said of the man who, bored with being wet by the rain, prepared himself without such a moral situation is demeaning; because man, in preference to everything, is a living will. I was told, not long ago, that the slightest disturbance to seek shelter from the downpours at the bottom of a river? This is the case with suicide; further, the senseless crime he commits is the result of God's lack of faith, hope, and love.

What can only in certain cases excuse it is madness, recognized as such; because the madman is not responsible for his actions. But, except in this case, suicide, the child of despair, leads straight to hell.

Since to perpetrate it requires a taboo such as ferocious energy, suicide is in fact an insignia of cowardice. Why does the suicide want to hang himself, asphyxiate himself, drink poison, make his brains fly? because it intends to desert the combat of life, which God presents to it; or, in other words, because he is a coward; as devoid of faith as of feelings.

And yet, here is the abyss into which the man who is not a Christian falls!

We must not put ourselves in the sad contingency of choosing one of the five indicated exits. Another has the Christian much more of her, much more secure, much more gentle; it shines with the light of heaven and is perfumed with the fragrances of divine love. Taking it only from us depends: Jesus Christ and the Church keep it open and frank in front of me, of you, of everyone. Enter it without fear; it is the only road of wisdom and sense, only

man finds himself in the throes of suffering. It's a haven for the storm: anyone who refuses to take shelter there is sure to be overshadowed more or less miserably.

XXXIV

ON HOW GREAT AND HEALTHY SUFFERING IS THE GRACE OF GOD'S MERCY.

This is where we've played more than once; but it matters so much that we get used to facing the mercy and goodness of God in the sufferings He sends us, what a strength it is for us to insist here more directly on the matter.

Has the reader necessarily heard of Blessed Margaret Mary, Religious of the Visitation, to whom Our Lord, some two centuries ago, deigned to reveal the adorable mysteries of his Sacred Heart?

This great servant of God had a sister-in-law, whom she loved dearly, but whose worldly spirit greatly afflicted her. He continually begged God for the salvation of this dear soul. One day, when the latter came to visit her in the locutory of the convent of Paray-le-Monial, the Blessed One insisted that her sister-in-law be converted, that she, moved, burst into tears and promised that from then on would serve God as a true Christian. "But, my dear sister, Blessed Margaret Mary added, perhaps God will require of you many sacrifices?—It matters little," replied the girl;

I want to save my soul at all costs. "At all costs?" My sister, are you serious? — Yes, dear sister, yes: at all costs! — Well, blessed be God! exclaimed the Religious Saint, her face radiant and illuminated. But prepare yourselves to suffer and to suffer a lot. Only with this condition will God save you. Now more than ever you will be remembered in my prayers."

Returning to her house, the excellent lady began to feel, first in her face, then in her head, and in all her limbs, extraordinary pains; after a few days they had become so atrocious, that the unfortunate one begged the help of all the saints of the heavenly court and consulted doctors and doctors in the hope of achieving some relief.

The husband turned to Blessed Soror, who replied: "All the efforts and care used are useless. The evil is not one for which medicine is effective. There are only two remedies suitable for application: patience and resignation."

In spite of this, they remained husband and wife in their attempts at healing by ordinary means. For a whole year the miserable patient walked from town to town and tried various doctors, until she he was discouraged: he had just given a conference in Lyons of fifty doctors, who at one time declared the ineffectiveness of their resources in the face of a disease they could not understand.

Margarida Maria's brother, having returned to Paray-le-Monial, took seriously the recommendations of his holy sister. He accepted, in agreement with his wife, the terrible ordeal, and the sick woman quite fervently declared that from then on she gave herself with all frankness to the will of God. "I will

suffer," he said, "if I must, until the end of my life as an atonement for my sins and in union with my crucified Saviour." Wonder! the disease has since ceased.

Amazed and mad with joy, the husband immediately went to his sister's convent, "I had not predicted it to you," I told her calmly. . Now the work is done; but keep yourselves both in the Lord's hands." The next day the sick woman, who had been unexpectedly and miraculously freed from her pains, died within a few hours with her soul enraptured in transports of faith and gratitude.

Therefore suffering is a benefit of God; grievous and bitter grace to nature, yet immensely salutary as far as sanctification is concerned. Was the year so painful that this poor lady spent, was it not really a splendid manifestation of divine mercy? If, instead of suffering, she had been condemned to good health, she would also have unquestionably continued her frivolous and distracted life and would have suddenly found herself on the threshold of eternity stripped of merit and without any preparation. The least that could happen to him would be to grieve indefinitely in the fiery and horrible expiations of Purgatory. Divine mercy followed in his wake: the cross, a benevolent and salutary cross, was granted to him through the intercession of the Blessed Servant of the Sacred Heart. Willingly or unwillingly, detachment from all his vanities was imposed on him; and since at first he had not endured suffering with the perfection of the saints, he nevertheless knew how to take advantage of it to do penance and to enter into himself; this was the scope of divine grace; and the fact of admirable conformity to the will of God, which crowned his long trial, brought to a close the work of his purification and salvation.

However, what fear is usually there of this manifestation of divine goodness! only the crucified one presents himself, bringing and offering his cross, everyone closes the door to him, as if it were the plague or the wrath of morbus.

These are repugnances that are daughters of our fragile nature; which incidentally is explainable: she, as has already been said, was not created for suffering. However, faith must contain and repress this first and thoughtless impulse; he is not a Christian; it is opposed to the merciful designs of Jesus Christ and our true good.

In fact, we must make a sincere welcome to the divine guest and receive on our knees and with deep faith, with gentleness, humility and gratitude, the rude gift he offers us. If we refuse, Jesus will desert our inhospitable habitation, and will take others, more generous, more worthy, at the same time more prudent and judicious, to the cross that contains salvation. How many are used to repel it! Here's what he said one day to Blessed Margaret Mary: "My daughter, give me shelter in your heart, me and my cross too. If I wanted to enter without my cross, many would welcome me. ; but I do not part with her. Will you love me and suffer for me?"

Our answer must be modeled on the one given by the Blessed One in the following terms: "Dearest Lord, I am all yours. I offer myself to suffer throughout my life whatever your love commands: as long as I love you in time and in eternity, I will be satisfied."

This is how true Christians understand and welcome suffering; and that is why, instead of repelling it, they desire it. They certainly don't find it very pleasant; for them, as for other men, suffering is always suffering, that is, very poignant and painful. But they have living and efficacious faith; they know from which hand the cross comes; but all hope rests on eternal life, which is approaching with great strides and which only deserves the name of life: you know. even in this world, living the true life, You know, more than other men, what is truly good and truly bad; and; what is bad has the good taste to prefer what is good, prefers what should save them to what can lose them.

St. Jerome Emiliano used to call his infirmities and other sufferings "the mercy of the Lord"; and in this sense I would like to repeat the psalm that begins with these words: "I will sing for ever the mercies of the Lord."

"In truth," he said, "my sufferings are irrefutable testimonies of the love of my God, who only gives me trials to purify me, only punishes me because he loves me. crucible, but gold and silver to be purified of all alloy and transformed into precious vessels. Thus God makes his chosen ones pass through the crucible of suffering, in order to purify them and transform them into saints of his beautiful Paradise. , therefore, the mercies of the Lord for ever; I will bless him forever, because he deigned to make me suffer on earth!"

Let him who is tempted to complain, let these beautiful feelings revive in his mind: and make a habit of not looking to the cross but to the one who imposes it, not overcome by anger, but by kindness and mercy.

XXXV

IT IS PREFERABLE TO SUFFER TO ENJOY IN THIS WORLD.

Man must suffer; it is this law of justice and atonement. It is not a question of cleaning up if you suffer rather than not, nor whether we are or are not sinners: it is the question of the following - it is preferable that man suffer in this world and enjoy all eternity, or that he enjoy this world and suffer forever. To the bad rich man, who from the depths of hell asked Lazarus for relief, the Lord replied: "During life you enjoyed all goods, while only evil fell by luck to poor Lazarus; now he is in bliss, and you in this abyss of pains."

Thus established in the light of truth, this question of such magnitude of itself is resolved. weight of reproof and divine curse. In this world, suffering for a year is already too much; to suffer for ten years is enormous; to suffer for fifty years would be unbearable, hopeless, beyond human strength; and yet what is ungrateful in parallel with immutable and infinite eternity? What is a year compared to a thousand years? What are a thousand years, a thousand centuries, and even a billion centuries compared to eternity? Eternity is duration that has no end; maturely ponder these words: "which has no end".

Suffer eternally! Suffer without ever ceasing to suffer! without a light of hope, without the slightest relief possible! And what a suffering this is! The private soul, eternally deprived of all light; imagination, of all beauty; the

heart, of all love; the awareness of all joy, all peace! The body deprived of all enjoyment; the whole eternally reprobate man repelled by God from heaven, deprived of happiness. And if only privations consisted in eternal suffering! But not; there is even more the positive curse, which involves sin; there is also the suffering of the reprobate immersed in "outer darkness", who feels lost in the unfathomable abyss of despair; who, in all the powers and capacities of the spirit of the body, suffers torments which we cannot even conceive; and especially "that unquenchable fire" of which the Gospel speaks, "this fiery geena where remorse does not die and flames always devour". Burning forever, burning without remission or respite: what a horror! Who among you, said the prophet, who among you can dwell in this devouring fire, in these eternal braziers?" your sufferings compared with those of hell? Wœ, you die of hunger and cold, what is your misery compared to this eternal misery! me, what are your sorrows alongside the sorrows and tears of the reprobate? Who among you, said the prophet, who among you can dwell in that devouring fire, in these eternal braziers?" your sufferings compared with those of hell? Wœ, you die of hunger and cold, what is your misery compared to this eternal misery! me, what are your sorrows alongside the sorrows and tears of the reprobate? Who among you, said the prophet, who among you can dwell in that devouring fire, in these eternal braziers?" your sufferings compared with those of hell? Wœ, you die of hunger and cold, what is your misery compared to this eternal misery! me, what are your sorrows alongside the sorrows and tears of the reprobate? what are your sufferings compared with those of hell? Wœ, you die of hunger, and of cold, what is your misery compared to this eternal misery! Unhappy troubled, sad and innocent victim of human calumnies and perversities, what are, tell me, what are your sorrows alongside the sorrows and tears of the reprobate? what are your sufferings compared with those of hell? Wœ, you die of hunger, and of cold, what is your misery compared to this eternal misery! Unhappy troubled, sad and innocent victim of human calumnies and perversities, what are, tell me, what are your sorrows alongside the sorrows and tears of the reprobate?

Well of course! borne with faith and love, your earthly sufferings will make you avoid condemnation and its unspeakable and endless pains. Isn't God, who at such a price facilitates your salvation, exceedingly good? After all, there is no subterfuge possible, God Himself declared it: "If you do not do penance, you will all die." There is no half harm or penance in this world, or hell in eternity.

But perhaps there is in the recesses of your soul the following bright hope: "I will only go to Purgatory."—Only to Purgatory? And is that little? Purgatory, with the exception of eternity and despair, is equivalent to hell; the fire is the same.

That's why St. Augustine said: "The fire of Purgatory is more terrible than all that man can suffer in this life." And St. Thomas Aquinas said: Better to suffer all the torments of martyrs than to suffer the pains of Purgatory."

What would you say, if someone intended to expose one of your hands to the fire for just one hour?

"Holy God! exclaim—I want all torments except this one." Well, Our Lord, through the cross and suffering, He will cause you to avoid the avenging fire

of Purgatory, a supernatural fire, incomprehensible, whose intensity, compared with the faint flames of the fire of this world, is like the effulgences of the sun compared to the dull light of a candle.

Believe me, accept the exchange, which is advantageous. Sickness, hardship, pain are your Purgatory on earth; Purgatory mitigated a thousand times by the compassionate Heart of Jesus, who, through countless means, both natural and supernatural, refreshes, mitigates and consoles your sufferings. In fact, is suffering with hope and love not equivalent to not suffering?

And then, the eternal happiness that awaits you if you faithfully carry the cross! In exchange for this, isn't it worth crying and suffering something on earth?

This happiness is as incomprehensible as the disgrace and torment of the reprobate. Hell is the contrast of paradise: in one sovereign the love of God reigns, and in the other his justice reigns. The happiness of heaven and the divine happiness itself communicated to God's elect: eternal happiness, infinite, pure and unmixed, about which St. Paul said, after the prophet Isaiah: "The eyes have not seen, the ears have not heard, the spirit could not understand the reward that God bestows on those who love him."

And the smallest act of Christian virtue practiced in a state of grace, the smallest act of patience, every thought of resignation, of love, of penance, entails an increase in eternal bliss and attains a higher degree of glory in that ineffable Paradise.

Yes, it is irrefutably right: it is better to suffer than to enjoy in this world. The lot of mundanes who do not suffer on earth must not defy envy: they will suffer in eternity. As imprescriptible is justice as the goodness of God: is it not inevitable that the sinner should be punished, and that the man who has faithfully served God obtains a reward? If the sinner is not punished in this world, it is because in the other infallible punishment awaits him; if the just - is not rewarded, it is because in heaven it will be eternally. So, therefore, must be quickened in the spirit and engraved in the heart, to swell it with joy, this great truth: it is better to suffer than to enjoy in this world.

XXXVI

WHY MAN SHOULD BE BEGIVE TO GOD FOR RELIEF OR CESSATION OF SUFFERING, WHICH IS SO USEFUL

It is because the relief and cessation of any evil is an act of goodness and mercy, and God is infinitely good and merciful. He practices a commendable act worthy of God who begs him for relief in his pains and their cessation.

Rest assured that this is not prohibited.

Nowhere in the Gospel is our Lord seen to rebuke the unhappy, blind, paralyzed, sick and afflicted who came to Him. On the contrary, he welcomed them with untiring kindness and occupied himself with comforting and healing them.

Such a request is not only not forbidden, but it becomes an excellent

thing in itself; for the Saviour gave such cures and exemptions from temporal evils as rewards. — "Retreat in peace," he said to the paralytic whom he cured, to the unfortunate hemorrhoid, and to many others — withdraw in peace, your faith has saved you." Would the request for something bad in itself deserve a reward? And then, isn't it true that always and everywhere a miraculous healing was seen in divine favor and extraordinary grace?

But then why is being healed, or at least relieved and comforted, a good thing?

Oh! My God! because suffering, though it can be used by faith, still retains its essence of evil, which it is. It is a point already established by us before, that all suffering is an evil, a disorder, a consequence of sin, fundamental evil and disorder. In his infinite mercy and in view of the adorable merits of Jesus Christ, God deigns to free us from sin through forgiveness: is it not very simple the same mercy allied to the same justice regarding the sufferings, the consequences of sin? and that, since he leaves suffering to us by way of expiation and trial, God wills to soften the pain, even sometimes to eliminate it altogether, in order to excite our faith and confidence?

Note that, highlighting the usefulness and value of sufferings, it is not intended to inculcate that they are good in themselves; no, a thousand times no; the profoundly holy truth that it is about proclaiming is that the grace of Jesus Christ from evil itself causes good to arise, and makes supernaturally good and profitable that which is naturally bad, horrible, repellent.

Is there anything more repellent and unpleasant than the string of evils of the entire caste reviewed in this booklet? Is there anything more horrible about you than death? However, it is not true that all these evils, although real, become even more real goods, when, by the vivacity of our faith, by the firmness of our patience, by the humility and mildness, by the love of Jesus Christ, by the faithful frequency of prayer and the sacraments, do we change them into spiritual goods and eternal merits?

It is a transformation similar to that of certain fruits, which are very bitter when raw and become delicious after being fired and confectioned. Raw quince, for example, is inedible, and when reduced to syrup it becomes very tasty.

Likewise, it is the grace of Our Lord like a mysterious sugar that metamorphoses all the travails of suffering.

So these two ideas: "Suffering is most useful" and "It is lawful to ask God for relief and cessation of suffering" are absolutely not mutually exclusive; rather they magnificently reconcile the rights of God's justice with those of his goodness, the rights of nature with the superior rights of grace.

If we were perfect, we would perhaps have the heroism of imitating some great saints, who never asked God for relief, much less cessation of their sufferings: in the light of faith they clearly saw that, compared with eternity, time is nothing; that the only thing necessary in this world is sanctification; therefore suffering and death were pure profits for them, who raised to the category of true treasures and marked favors everything that could humiliate and subdue the rebellious nature, such as diseases, infirmities, privations,

outrages, calumnies, persecutions, the ordeals. They exclaimed with St. Paul: "Among my tribulations I overflow with joy;" or else, when they were humiliated or when suffering intensified, they would say to Our Lord, like Blessed Margaret Mary: "My Savior, I am not worthy of such enhanced graces. I humbly thank you for the acuteness of your love, which, despite my sins, deigns to make me something like you."

But such heroic feelings, for being true and logical, are not at the height and reach of many.

We, riddled with imperfections, second- and third-rate Christians, walk modestly on the beaten road.

Not being able to be good angels, let us at least try to be good men, and as Francis de Sales jokingly says: let us bear as holy as possible all the privations of our miserable life and, even if we link to the crosses that God sends us very high and just esteem, let us not forget to beseech him, animated with filial confidence, to grant us some consolation, and even, if he so deems useful to his glory, to put an end to our evils.

XXXVII

OF HOW THE MOST HEALTHY SUFFERING IS THE SAME THAT GOD SENDS.

When the attempt to defeat us face to face does not succeed, the enemy of our soul attacks us sideways, through illusions. Whoever lets himself be carried away by them will be defeated.

For those who suffer, the most common illusion is to assume that they would gladly accept the crosses they do not yet have, but that they are unable to patiently suffer the cross that is oppressing them.

It is easy to conceive how dangerous this error becomes, which is the opposite of what God expects of us. When He sends us this or that disease, it is evidently for us to sanctify ourselves through that which was sent to us, and not through any other. The illusion that it is about upsets the designs of God, and fascinates us with a chimerical sanctification. The fable of the dog is absolutely reproduced, which through the shadow left the prey excited: the poor patient runs after a shadow of sanctification, losing, however, the real and real opportunity to sanctify himself.

So, if you have a headache, don't say, "If I had pain in the leg or in the stomach, go ahead: but in the head: it's totally intolerable."

Whoever is blind should not say: "Even if I were deaf: but blind! Nothing worse than that!"

Whoever is paralyzed, crippled or deformed, don't say: everything would be enough not to have what I have. It is easy for others to be resigned. Ah! if they only knew what I have...!"

No one should envy the cross of others, whatever yours.

The one apparently made of lighter wood, was so carved that it leaves more deep welts on the shoulders of the bearer. Another, which only shows

the polished and showy side, may seem softer; but whoever contemplated the roughness and jaggedness of the opposite side would recoil in terror. There

are crosses of wood, iron, silver, gold; some there are of paper and of cotton, others are all adorned with flowers and seem only to be formed of roses, finally, others are inlaid with diamonds and gemstones. Ah, crosses are all of them, and those that are regarded as such are not always less painful.

Bent under his rough wooden cross, he stretches his poor covetous eyes over the rich man's golden cross. "Oh," he exclaims to himself, "if I had nothing to carry but such a cross!" And the miser is unaware that gold is heavier than wood, and that the golden cross is crushing.

The magnates, nailed to their splendid cross of diamonds or roses, often come in to lament their own fate, and say to themselves: Oh! if I was of humble social standing!" Those who weep believe that being hungry is preferable to weeping; and those who are hungry are prone to belittle the suffering that bleeds the heart and befalls the mind and reputation. a thousand vain regrets, a thousand vain desires All this is just illusions, pure illusions!

They are war traces of the old Serpent, which seeks to lengthen man from the path of realities, and therefore of merits, in order to: stray him into the invia region of chimeras. We must remain in the truth, only there will we find God, and with it all the special graces with which he helps us to suffer holy. Furthermore, let us never forget that Our Lord knows how to do much better than we do; if he crucifies us one way and not another let us not entertain the ludicrous purpose of mending his hand, and the little modest belief in the superiority of our pondering and counsel. A man full of sanctity, telling me of a misfortune that had befallen him with great grief and against all expectations, told me one day:

"Note that only the Crucified One knows how to crucify ourselves well. When we intend to crucify ourselves, we straighten our backs so that the cross does not offend us, and then, when it hurts us, we always have the inner satisfaction of having done the our own will. As for Jesus Christ, when He crucifies us, He does so; the cross is of hardwood and very hard; the nails are very sharp and really penetrate; and here we are stretched out, not because it is ours will, but by effect of the will of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of the will, this is the true crucifixion.

And then, the question is not of choice, it is of accepting.

The choice is up to God. No fears, dear crucified ones: He is well versed in the matter; he knows what suits us best, because he knows the intimate knowledge of our spiritual miseries and illnesses.

He applies the cross exactly to the sensitive part, in the manner of a skilful surgeon, who, instead of sinking the scalpel at random, goes straight to evil and pierces the hidden ulcer; if there was no scalpel cut: the ulcer would produce purulent absorption and therefore death. To save us, God has a thousand and one crosses at his disposal; He imposes on us even that which his sovereign science, or rather his paternal charity, indicates to him; and it always accompanies it, be aware of this—always—of the graces that are necessary for us to enjoy the remedy well. The hand that wounds to heal is also the hand that distills balm over the wound.

So, let us have submission and love! Let us love our cross, because it, and not someone else's, is responsible for lifting us from earth to heaven.

XXXVIII

ON HOW ALL THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD ARE GIVEN TO US BY THE MERCY HANDS OF THE HOLY VIRGIN

All the consolations of God are summed up in the adorable and adored person of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom they emanate with profusion on the earth. Jesus Christ, King of heaven, is like a radiant sun, whose rays flood souls with peace, joy, strength, love and happiness.

Now, it was through the Holy Virgin Mary that God the Father gave Jesus Christ to the world; Mary is the Mother of the Universal Comforter. Isn't it very simple that Jesus, in his turn, wanted all the consolations he distributed to men to come through his Blessed Mother? The heavenly Father had chosen the Virgin Mary to give us the Comforter; the latter, in turn, chose her to distribute his divine consolations to us. Such is the order established by providence. This he proclaims to the Church every day when he invokes the Holy Virgin under the blessed names of "Mother of divine grace — Comforter of the afflicted, Salvation of the sick, — Refuge of sinners, — Relief of Christians."

Thus, all consolation, whatever it may be, proceeds from divine goodness through Jesus Christ our Lord; and Jesus Christ transmits it to us through the hands of the one he chose for his and our Mother.

What the Holy Virgin does invisibly in heaven for each one of us, the Church does at the same time on earth and visibly; because the Church is also our Mother and consoler. This fact does not matter to us the existence of two Mothers: no; The Holy Virgin in heaven and the Church on earth are one and the same motherhood; just as, in the natural order, our heavenly Father and our earthly father constitute one and the same fatherhood.

There is nothing so consoling in the trials and bitterness of life as the love of the Blessed Virgin. It is the very love of Jesus and God; but, passing through the Immaculate and maternal Heart of the Virgin of Mercy, this holy love takes on a touch of tender, paternal and consoling. Just as in the family, the mother's heart is unearthed in particular extremes of love and trust that fill the domestic home with enchantments; in the same way, the love of the Blessed Virgin, as it involves the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, softens its divine ardor and prevents the weak and sinners from becoming discouraged in the face of the Saviour's infinite holiness. Mary's consoling love is, therefore, the love of Jesus Christ, but in a form more suited to our misery.

All the saints suffered a lot and all tenderly loved the Holy Virgin. Prodigious strengths and joys drew from Mary's love.

St. Bernard, one of the greatest saints that produced the Church and also one of the greatest geniuses that France produced, placed such trust in the Blessed Virgin that he turned to her in every effort and difficulty; and God knows how many you've enjoyed in your life. With such maternal kindness she consoled him and assisted the Mother of God, that he "overflowed with

joy between tribulations." He composed, in the transports of his recognition, that famous prayer that all Christendom knows and repeats almost as familiarly as the Hail Mary: "Remember, O most merciful Virgin Mary, who has never been heard that he who has resorted to your protection, « he implored your help, and asked for your help to have been abandoned. Encouraged by such trust, I come to you, to you I turn, O Virgin of virgins and my mother! Groaning at the weight of my sins, I prostrate myself in your presence. Deign yourselves, Mother of God, do not reject my supplication; but listen favorably and attend to it."

This does not mean that the Holy Virgin grants us all the graces we ask of her, and especially those we ask for them: dispenser of God's graces, she does God's way: she loves us better than we could, and she grants us many times the opposite of what we asked you to do, because that is what suits us best. But, let the sinner be completely sure of this, the Blessed Virgin always listens to him, attends to him, obtains the graces and blessings of God. In heaven the extremes of maternal love with which she supported her servants and the dangers from which she delivered them will be evident.

When we are troubled and cut off from suffering, let us turn, therefore, to the Most Holy Virgin of mercy; let us ask him with more commitment, patience, than relief; holiness with more commitment than health; eternal salvation, with greater effort, than temporal prosperity.

If she grants us the estimable joys of this world, let us give her thanks; if she brings us her son's cross with the grace that we bear it holy, may our gratitude be even greater.

We must never ask him for a temporal grace except on condition that we take advantage of our sanctification.

In our pains, let us console ourselves at the feet of our Mother. Don't children turn to their mothers to deposit their sorrows in their breasts, to show them the scratches and violence of which they are victims? How do they proceed. "If you are not like little children—the Lord tells us—you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

The simpler and more trusting our relationship with the Holy Virgin, the more valuable it will be. Let us implore it with all our hearts; let us love her dearly; most sweet and merciful, she will come to us, and will gently comfort us during life and at the moment of our death.

Blessed forever be your most holy name!

THE END.

Laus Deo, Virginique matri.