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# Baptism of Suffering

**David Geraets, O.S.B.**



# BAPTISM OF SUFFERING

by

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*If anyone wants to come with me,  
he must forget himself, carry his  
cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).*

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During the past few years of my association with pentecostal renewal, I have experienced God working many healings — physically, psychically, spiritually — in the name of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit's power. So while writing these words on the baptism of suffering, I do not intend to lessen the importance of teaching and experiencing divine healing in any manner.

But just because we are all zealous about hearing and preaching a full Gospel message, the Spirit urges us to proclaim the cross of Jesus Christ (baptism of suffering) as well as His resurrection power, presently operative within His Body (II Cor. 1, 5). For the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead not only gives life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8, 11); He also makes known His loving presence within our hearts (I John 3 & 4)—even resulting in profound joy when we are privileged to suffer something for the sake of Jesus' name (Acts 5, 41). The Messianic King of Luke 4, 18 (Isaiah 61) is also the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

Sacred Scripture tells us of four baptisms: the baptism of John, which was a baptism in water — directly connected with a message and experience of repentance (Mk. 1, 4); Christian Baptism, carried out in the full name and authority of our Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28, 19); baptism in the Holy Spirit, bringing a supernatural power to witness for Christ (Acts 1, 5 & 8); the baptism of suffering, a total sur-

render of our whole being into God's hands — martyrdom, if need be, a suffering unto death (Lk. 12, 50).

Jesus calls His own passion and death a baptism. Mark's Gospel records a request made by the sons of Zebedee to sit at Christ's right and left hand in glory. Our Lord replies to their request with these words: "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way that I must be baptized?" (Mk. 10, 38).

Jesus is already aware of the spiritual and physical surrender He will make in walking the way of the cross; He places His whole being at the complete disposal of His Father. To the point of death, and even though it means death, He trusts His loving Father. But by taking upon Himself the guilt of all sin, He pays through His sufferings a divine price to expiate that sin. With the words spoken to James and John (and later by His own actions), Christ shows that the fulfillment of His plan for their lives will also demand a similar complete giving of their whole being into the hands of their Father — again, if need be, for the suffering of death.

What seems for man an almost impossible request: sacrificial death — that God should ask a human father like Abraham to offer up his only son, Isaac, as a token of obediential love, for example — is freely and lovingly done by our Father and Jesus for us without



hesitation. God "did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all" (Rom. 8, 32).

### As Master, So Disciple

It is written for emulation, not merely admiration. "Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers" (I John 3, 16), because "The greatest love a man can have for his friends is to give his life for them" (John 15, 13). It does not require the greatest possible love to die for a friend in the sense that dying for a friend would be sought out and embraced as an empirical proof of our love for him to an onlooking world. To die for a friend is to *do* something for him, to give ourselves over completely for him. Love is manifested in this very *action*, not as a kind of proof, but simply for its own sake of *loving*.

The believer cannot be a person who measures with two different yardsticks: one for the Father and Jesus, another for himself. "A pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher, and a slave like his master" (Matt. 10, 25; John 15, 20). Our heavenly Father cannot content Himself with only heartfelt thanks. He must be able to recognize a true image of His very own Son in every man and woman professing to be Christian. The life of Jesus is recapitulated in every one of His *true* sons and daughters.

Christ's Body continues to live through the Spirit becoming flesh within men.



“Surely you know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit lives in you” (I Cor. 3, 16). True discipleship wishes to perpetuate the works of the Master — to build the Kingdom — in fact, to be a ready and willing instrument of Jesus continuing His work. Believers are sensitively yielded to the Spirit in such a manner that those same signs and wonders (manifestations of God’s Kingdom being present) may also be associated with them as a Body (I Cor. 12; Mk. 16, 17). “I tell you the truth: whoever *believes* in me *will do* the works I do — yes, he *will do* even greater ones, for I’m going to the Father” (John 14, 12).

### For the Community

But believers also remember Paul’s words: “By means of my physical sufferings I help complete what still remains of Christ’s sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col. 1, 24). Christ’s Body, like Jesus Himself, continues to learn obedience through suffering (Heb. 5, 8). Christians rejoice in the privilege that they can suffer something to benefit the community, just as they are happy to seek and use charismatic gifts for the same purpose. It is also by bearing one another’s burdens that we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6, 2), continuing the work of the Master. Jesus’ passion and death bring value into — not evasion from — suffering.

What is probably most amazing, how-

ever, is a certain realization that frequently comes to us only during moments of reflection: the whole ordeal was really a manifestation of God's Love. To assent, to accept is to discover that His plan is *perfectly* right, that it is in fact the only thing which *is* perfectly right. "God must be true, even though every man is a liar" (Rom. 3, 4). The transcendent modality of His operation (divine loving plan for us) is far beyond our limited comprehension.

For this reason, believers do not attempt to satisfy God with any love or truth other than that He accords them. Who is in a position to decide how he would repay his Father for His infinite Love? But — "One of you, then, will say to me, 'If this is so, how can God find fault with a man? For who can resist God's will?' But who are you, my friend, to talk back to God? A clay pot does not ask the man who made it, 'Why did you make me like this?' After all, the man who makes the pots has the right to use the clay as he wishes, and to make two pots from the same lump of clay, an expensive pot and a cheap one" (Rom. 9, 19-21).

Yet the fact of God's Love remains unquestionably true. When the Word says that God Loves man, He really means that GOD LOVES MAN — despite or even due to the baptism of suffering. A God who is certainly beyond all suffering speaks as if He Himself suffers; self-sufficient, Eternal Bliss talks as though He

could desire, yearn, change His mind in a moment of compassion:

Is Ephraim my dear son?  
Is he my darling child?  
For as often as I speak against him,  
I do remember him still.  
Therefore my heart yearns for him;  
I will surely have mercy on him,  
says the Lord. (Jer. 31, 20)

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!  
How can I hand you over, O Israel!  
. . . My heart recoils within me,  
my compassion grows warm and tender.  
(Hos. 11, 8)

Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, and said, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." . . . Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your Father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years of your life." (Isaiah 38)

Or take the Person of Jesus Himself—  
Divine Love "Personified":

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times have I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me. (Matt. 23, 37)

Our Father is a personal God: never to be analyzed or understood, but always to be approached in a loving relationship. He "reveals deep and mysterious things" (Dan. 2, 22). But the certainty which His revelation brings—there is purpose and meaning behind the incomprehensible: the mystery of suffering



— merits reason for great exaltation (Ps. 97, 1-2). We worship our God of Love and compassion, not by deifying mystery, but by seeking the face of Him who in His wisdom surpasses all mysteries. Then He gives us His Spirit to understand those “things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond the mind of man, all prepared by God for those who love him” (I Cor. 2, 9). He teaches us by demonstrating that He is a God of Love. How is this so? The lesson is taught in the things found about us.

## God the Artist

One of the types of love we frequently experience or witness in this life is that which an artist feels for his product of creation. God’s relationship with man is pictured as such in Jeremiah’s vision of the potter and the clay; likewise, Peter speaks of the whole Church as a building on which God is at work, and the individual members as stones. (Our Lord is chiseling away at the rock. We sometimes flinch a bit, or try to roll out of reach.)

The Christian is a divine work in the making. Therefore, God will not be satisfied until she or he possesses a certain character. Here we meet with what seems an almost intolerable compliment.

Over a sketch made on the spur of a moment to amuse some child, an artist may not take much trouble; he will probably be content to let it go as it is, even though it does not reflect exactly what



he had hoped or intended it to be. But over the great masterpiece of his lifetime, the work he loves as deeply as a man loves a woman or a mother her child, he will *take* endless trouble and at the same time probably *give* endless trouble to the picture in the process of creation.

Personify its impression at being rubbed out, scraped and started over again and again — wishing it were only a quick sketch whose making would be over in a few minutes. Compare this reflection with the secret thoughts and spoken words we humans frequently harbor: “Why didn’t God design us for a less glorious and less difficult destiny?” During such moments we are asking for less Love, not for more. We would water down the Gospel, denying or fleeing from the cross — Tabor, yes; Calvary, no! But how can there be a resurrection without some sort of dying?

My son, if you come to serve the Lord,  
prepare yourself for trials.

Put your heart right, and constantly endure,  
and do not flee when disaster strikes.

Cling to him and do not run away,  
so that you may be rewarded at the  
end of your days.

Whatever happens to you, take it cheerfully,  
and be patient when you are reduced  
to a humble state.

For gold is tried in the fire,  
and chosen men in the furnace of  
humiliation.

Believe in him and he will support you  
follow a straight path and trust in him.

(Ecclus. 2, 1-6)

Why does He have to Love us so

much? St. Teresa has made a remark to the effect that: "If this is the way you treat your friends, O Lord, no wonder you have so few." Yet one of the main reasons why divine Love seeks so earnestly to improve man is simply because He has already placed so much goodness within human nature. His investment is extensive. It should accrue great interest, "bear much fruit," not through some introspective analysis on the sorry state of human sinfulness (except in the case where one arises from the repentance of a concrete sin and hastens to amendment), but by a humble rejoicing in the good things that God has done and continues to do through his people. "This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away" (I John 4, 10).

### God's Pets

Another type of love shown frequently in the Bible and used to symbolize the Love relation between God and man is the love a man has for an animal; e.g.: "We are his people, the flock that he pastures" (Ps. 100). It can probably be better understood in our day through the love a man may have for his dog. The reason a man has a dog is primarily for the man's sake: he tames the dog that he may love it, not that it may love him; that it may serve him, not that he may serve it. But at the same time, the dog's interests are not sacrificed to his master's.

The main purpose (that he may love it) cannot be fully achieved unless the dog in its own fashion loves his master. Nor can a dog serve man unless man in some way serves it.

Now just because the dog is by human standards one of the most lovable of animals, man interferes with the dog and makes it more humanly lovable than it was in mere nature. In its natural state the dog has a smell and certain habits which frustrate man's love. So he washes it, he house-breaks it, teaches it not to steal, trains it to perform many feats: this way he is enabled to love it more completely. A puppy going through this whole ordeal (if it were a theologian) would probably cast grave doubts (causing a credibility crisis) on the goodness of man.

But if we take a full-grown, well-trained dog — one that is larger, healthier and longer lived than the wild dog; admitted by grace as it were into a whole new world of affections, loyalties, interests and comforts entirely beyond its fondest animal dreams — such a dog would probably not entertain these thoughts of apprehension. Love tames its being into another dimension of awareness.

It should be noted that a man *takes* all these pains with a dog and *gives* all these pains to the dog just because it is an animal high in his scale of love values: because it is so nearly lovable, it becomes worth his while to try and make it fully



lovable. Normally, we don't train bedbugs or bathe centipedes! Taming expects a loving response.

We humans may wish that we were of so little account to God that He would leave us alone to follow our own natural impulses, that He would give up on trying to make us into something so unlike our natural selves. Once again, we are not asking for more Love, but for less. We would water down the Good News, denying or fleeing the cross — Tabor, yes; Calvary, no! But how can there be a resurrection without some sort of dying?

### Father and Son

Another example used in the Scripture to depict God's Love for man is a father's love for his son. Our Lord employs it consistently, and such an image is basic to the "Our Father." But every time *we* use this term "father" *we* must remember that Jesus used it in a time and place where paternal authority stood for much more than it does in our society. A father who apologizes for having brought his son into the world ("we have more people than we know what to do with already"), afraid to correct him lest he cause inhibitions ("I can't punish my own son!") or hesitant to instruct him lest he interfere with his independence of mind ("Let him learn for himself") is a most misleading example for Divine Paternity. And so is the father image of our inner cities, for that matter.



One must come back to the Word to see how sonship was regarded. Here we find Jesus completely surrendering His will to His Father's and not even allowing Himself to be called "good," because Good is the name reserved for His Father alone. Love between father and son, in this context, means authoritative love on the one side and obedient love on the other. A real father uses his authority to help his son grow into that sort of person which he, rightly, in his superior wisdom (let us hope), can see he should become. Even in our days not many people would subscribe to this kind of statement: "I love my son, but I don't care how big a bum he turns out to be as long as he has a good time."

Yet during those moments of trial, when feelings don't assure us, sacred Scripture consoles us:

Have you forgotten the encouraging words which God speaks to you as his sons?

My son, pay attention when the Lord punishes you,

And do not be discouraged when he rebukes you.

For the Lord punishes everyone he loves,  
And whips everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure what you suffer as being a father's punishment; because your suffering shows that God is treating you as his sons. Was there ever a son who was not punished by his father? If you are not punished as all sons are, it means you are not true sons, but bastards. In the case of our human fathers, they punished us and we respected them. How much more, then, should we submit to our spiritual Father and live!

Our human fathers punished us for a short

time, as it seemed right to them. But God does it for our own good, so that we may share his holiness.

When we are punished, it seems to us at the time something to make us sad, not glad. Later, however, those who have been disciplined by such punishment reap the peaceful reward of righteous life" (Heb. 11, 5-11).

Only when we slide back into judging by *merely* humanistic values do we flee this training. And again during those moments we would water down the Gospel, denying or fleeing the cross—Tabor, yes; Calvary, no! But how can there be a resurrection without some sort of dying?

## Husband and Wife

There is another human example found in sacred Scripture and used frequently to demonstrate God's Love for man: it is precisely the love which exists between the sexes, a man's love for a woman and a woman's love for a man. In one use of this image, Israel, the people of God from the Old Testament, is frequently called a false wife or an unfaithful partner. God, the heavenly husband, promises to remain always faithful, recalling happier days. As He says through the prophet Jeremiah: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. 2, 2). God appears to look for repentance with a certain nostalgic hope.

James uses a similar idea in referring to unfaithful people who conform to

the ways of the world as “adulteresses, while God jealously longs for the spirit he has planted within us to be his alone” (James 4, 4). The Church is frequently referred to as the bride of Christ whom He loves so dearly that He cannot tolerate a spot or a wrinkle in her. For love by its very own nature demands the perfecting of the beloved.

Our own experience teaches us this: when we fall in love with a woman or a man, do we then cease to care whether they are clean, dirty, fair or foul? Do we not more often than first begin to care? Would any woman, for example, regard it as a sign of love in a man that he neither knows nor cares how she is looking? When we fall in love with someone, we expect him or her to be a person worthy of keenest considerations.

Love may Love the beloved when all beauty seems lost; but surely not because it is lost. Love may forgive all faults and still Love in spite of them (in order to give the beloved an opportunity and invitation to become lovable); but Love cannot cease to wish they were gone.

Love is more aware than hatred itself of every blemish in the beloved; its sensitivity is more acute and gentle than the tender feelers of a chambered snail. Of all powers Love forgives the most, but condones the least; Love is pleased with little, but asks for all.

We humans may wish that we were of so little account to our Father that He would be content to let us remain away



from home, unfaithful in our commitment to Him; that He wouldn't demand so much, but rather let us go our own ways. Once again we are asking for less Love, not for more. We would water down the Good News, denying or fleeing the cross — Tabor, yes; Calvary, no! But how can there be a resurrection without some sort of dying?

Our heavenly Father cannot content Himself with mere heartfelt thanks and human activity. He should be able to recognize His own Son in every man and woman who might dare to call themselves Christian. Only legitimate sons and daughters (born-again heirs) will inherit His Kingdom. Divine adoption becomes a self-validating experience when "God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children" (Rom. 8, 16). And it is brought about through suffering: "Since we are his children, we will possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for *if* we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory" (Rom. 8, 17). "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (II Tim. 2, 11).

### Continual Birth

Legitimacy requires a constant metamorphosis: man was born to die over and over only to be resurrected again and again. Persistent death to the old man (selfishness and sin), continual birth to the new man (putting on the Lord Jesus) is a Christian necessity. "So get



rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to — the old self which was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new. You must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness, and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy" (Eph. 4, 22-24).

But this metamorphosis is always a painful ordeal: it means *dying* to one way of living, *risking* an uncertain birth and *trusting* Someone enough to give our lives completely over to Him, realizing that He is forever going to be taking us into new situations where the unknowns make us feel insecure. He expects us to depend *entirely* on Him *alone*, not on idols.

However, the alternatives are abhorribly depressive, while the promises are expectingly hopeful. Jesus, honestly and frankly, tells Nicodemus: "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, and Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3, 5-6). For "When you plant a seed in the ground it does not sprout to life unless it dies" (I Cor. 15, 36). "If it does die, then it produces many grains. Whoever loves his own life will lose it; whoever hates his own life in this world will keep it for life eternal" (John 12, 24-25).

To accept this Loving Providence is to experience it as being *perfectly right*: that it is in fact the only thing which is perfectly right. Our Father has no grand-

children: mere physical birth (even from Christian parents) gives no one a heritage to the Kingdom (John 1, 13). The caterpillar must be changed — grow wings, become air-borne—if it is to operate in heavenly dimensions.

Yet the prospect of continual metamorphosis seems as trying to our Father (who is also our Mother) as it is to any of His children. Perhaps, this is the reason why Jesus chooses childbirth for an example when He speaks about such an occurrence.

I tell you the truth: you will cry and weep, but the world will be glad; you will be sad, but your sadness will turn into gladness. When a woman is about to give birth to a child she is sad, because her hour of suffering has come; but when the child is born she forgets her suffering, because she is happy that a child has been born into the world. That is the way it is with you: now you are sad, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness, the kind of gladness that no one can take away from you. (John 16, 20-22)

This happening can also be summed up in the twofold meaning we should attach to “sacrifice” itself. On the one hand, there is an element of immolation, destruction, mortification and loss. Here the believer embraces death, making it his own, through a continual preparation for it in *living* (mortification: “making dead” selfishness and sin). But “sacrifice” can also indicate the resurrected change resulting from a new way of living.

To sacrifice, in this context, is “to

make holy." It means penetrating something with the highest possible value it can receive; it consists in an act of continually infusing the secular with the sacred: dynamic incarnation. Only God is completely sacred and holy. Consequently, to sacrifice something is to bring about divinization — permeate it with the divine — opening and filling it with God's presence: sanctifying, blessing it!

### **Divinization**

The ramifications are enormous. Because "God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in God and God lives in him" (I John 4, 16), divinization must be the process of enveloping, immersing, saturating, baptizing something or someone in Divine Love. Christians sacrifice (consecrate) one another and become living sacrifices (sanctified, blessed, holy) when they serve one another in Christ's Body; this way they communicate God's Spirit and love of each other.

The most religious act becomes operative in the secular domain. Just as divine and human natures fuse in Christ — one Person — sacred and secular intermingle when Christians act supernaturally natural and naturally supernatural. There is no greater humanizing action or act of religion than calling a man to genuine Love, because Love consecrates and divinizes him. Nothing is more divine and human (more sacrificing) than man's activity of Loving.

To be resurrected to this new activity



of Loving is what Paul calls “putting on the Lord Jesus” (Rom. 13, 14). Jesus is Holiness made manifest in time; He reveals Divine Love to our earthly order in His very Person. Divinization is represented perfectly in Him; His humanity is permeated with Divine Love when “the Holy Spirit (comes) down upon him in bodily form, like a dove” (Lk. 3, 22). He is most careful to bear witness to this spiritual anointing of Love when He begins to preach the Word: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has *anointed* me to preach the Good News to the poor” (Lk. 4, 18).

### “Learn from Me”

Love characterizes the whole Person of Jesus: Divine and human. We see the fruit of the Holy Spirit revealed in Him perfectly. Jesus manifests LOVE: Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Humility and Self-Control (Gal. 5, 22). He is King of kings, showing us exactly what the people wishing to enter His Kingdom must be like. “Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit” (Matt. 11, 29). Paul makes his own personal appeal for being an authentic apostle of Christ on this very basis: “I who am said to be meek and mild when I am with you . . . I beg you, by the gentleness and kindness of Christ: Do not force me to be bold with you when I come” (II Cor. 10, 1-2).

But Love is demonstrated in Jesus

most clearly during His passion, death and resurrection. Here He epitomizes SACRIFICE: *giving* His whole life — whole Self — and *totally sanctifying* His humanity. The bringing of complete Love into His offering results in this perfect divinization: His precious Blood is poured out for *immolation* and *sanctification*. It is the Sacrifice of Redemption, bringing about a radical metamorphosis (His humanity was in constant adjustment to His Divinity during His entire lifetime) in Christ's humanity. This same occasion makes possible that eventual outpouring of His Love (the Holy Spirit) on all mankind (John 7, 39).

There is a special uniqueness about this kind of Love that Jesus shows among the sons of men: it effects that *peculiar change* which establishes filial relationship with our Father. "You have heard it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' But now I tell you: love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you, so that you will become the sons of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5, 44-45). Love — for one's friends and especially for one's enemies — strong enough to overcome even suffering and death — gives Christ the victory (I Cor. 15, 53-57).

Jesus does not undergo suffering and death as if they were good things in themselves. Our Father is not a sadist and His Son an aberrant masochist. The cross is in itself an evil (it results in death) tolerated by God for a greater

good. "Father, if you will, take this cup away from me. Not my will, however, but your will be done" (Lk. 22, 42).

### The Greatest Love

There simply was no other way, because the cross precipitates that occasion when Christ brings forth the greatest Love this world has ever known; human and cosmic transformation required *His* special outpouring of Divine Love. "It was only right for God (who creates and preserves all things) to make Jesus perfect through suffering, in order to bring many sons to share his glory. For Jesus is the one who leads them to salvation" (Heb. 2, 10).

Jesus (the Christ) was anointed with the Spirit of Love to such a degree that He not only forgave His enemies. He poured out His heart in loving prayer for them: "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing" (Lk. 23, 34). These words are not merely pious sentiment; profound concern, inspired by real Love for people without reservation, is concretely demonstrated. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, is given to show forth this very same Love while being stoned: "Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!" (Acts 7, 60).

So our cross in life — maybe it's another person, happening or thing that irritates us — is not something good in itself. God does not enjoy making us miserable! Only our Father, and His lov-



ing plan for each of us, is good. He will permit the cross in our lives when He in His superior wisdom perceives the possibility of a greater good being born out of it.

The cross provides us an occasion for our own change of heart. Like the Law, it is given to multiply the opportunities for falling. But since the grace given to rise above these tests or trials is more than sufficient, we are to become strengthened (built-up, sanctified) by continually yielding ourselves to a deeper walk in the Spirit on the occasion of each temptation. "So then, just as sin ruled by means of death, so also God's grace rules by means of righteousness, leading us to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5, 20-21).

### **Point of Decision**

Divine and human love are seen most evidently through the establishment of right relationships: the right relationship with God, with man and with one's self. Our cross brings us to a point of decision. The way we react towards the test or trial God has permitted determines, in one sense, our destiny. When God allows someone to injure us, for example, we have two alternatives: Love or hatred. We must either let go of our own selfishness and sin on this occasion or else we will let go of Divine Love.

On the one hand, we can yield to self-pity, frustration, bitterness, resentment and unhappiness. We then sever our re-

lationship with others as we quarrel, protest, accuse, judge and demonstrate our unwillingness to forgive them. And as the heart becomes cold and hardened, our personalities freeze: we turn off men and God. This is, literally speaking, to make *hell* out of living: to bring on fear, anxiety, depression, physical ailments and even suicidal afflictions. It is yielding ourselves captive to the powers of evil, enmeshed in sinning that leads to death.

This is the reason for Jesus telling Peter explicitly: "Put your sword back in its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26, 52). The normal thing for me to do when somebody wrongs me is to fight back. I immediately go on the defensive and look for some power to use in lording it over my brother. I try to organize life into being instead of being a loving-living organism imparting Life. So I turn to techniques for manipulation: money; physical, moral, spiritual coercion; science or propaganda.

The point of Christ's remark is that *I* should *not be against* any person or thing. *I* should not get caught up in the vicious circle of violence: the perpetration and perpetuation of hatred. That is giving in to evil and avoiding my own conversion. To live by the sword is to remain walled in: to be a slave to the world of darkness, yielding to the demonic forces of Satan's dominion, to be

dead, consciously reflexive about the matter or not. Yet it is (still) by their fruits you will know them (Matt. 7, 16ff.).

“People become enemies, they fight, become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not receive the Kingdom of God” (Gal. 5, 20-21). And again, “The result of these things is death!” (Rom. 6, 21). For a Christian, the effort is to be expended in combating “wicked forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age” (Eph. 6, 12); not to fight against fellow human beings! If we must accuse and curse, may our words always be directed toward the devil when we do so.

But a Christian should be alert enough to discover better alternatives: he should always be prepared to LOVE. Because “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous, or conceited, or proud; love is not ill-mannered, or selfish, or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up: its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Love is eternal” (I Cor. 13, 4-8).

This is the alternative which a Christian should bring to his cross. All relationships — with God, man and one’s



self — can suddenly become open and right. It is the only possible manner of reconciliation. To act otherwise, to claim the reconciliation of Jesus with the Father as our own and not to forgive (Love) our brother is to act like the wicked servant in the Gospel. His master forgave him a great debt, but he refused to forgive his fellow servant a little one. This caused the master to reconsider and have the wicked servant punished. Jesus concludes: “That is how my Father in heaven will treat you if you do not forgive your brother, every one of you, from your heart” (Matt. 18, 23).

### Change My Heart

It all adds up to change — principally a change of heart—my own change, not someone else's; e.g., not the person who causes me injury. (He may need change too, but that is another matter to take up with the Lord after I have forgiven him.) My selfishness and sin must be overcome, so that Love can be manifest in and through me. I must put on the Lord Jesus and become a citizen of God's Kingdom. That means I must be sacrificed (resurrected) to a new way of living: Loving — being in constant adjustment with my Father and His will, just as was Jesus.

Here is the moment of true Christian witness: when *I* realize that *I* must change and be transformed. The desire for martyrdom (meaning a *living* witness par excellence), the longing to be trans-

formed is beautifully expressed by St. Ignatius, second-century martyr - Bishop of Antioch in Syria: "I am the wheat of Christ, may I be ground by the fangs of wild beasts and become spotless bread. Allow me to imitate the passion of my God. Now do I begin to be in truth His disciple. Fire, the cross, wild beasts and all the torments of the devil may overwhelm me, provided that at least I possess Jesus Christ."

On the grounds of such great testimony, it becomes obvious that I should not try to overcome others like the powers of evil — make them change — but *I* should yield and let God overcome *my* egotistical conceit. This defeat of my pride can actually become the road for victory, since it provides me with an entrance into God's Kingdom and intimate participation within the very Trinitarian Life Itself — *NOW!* If I Love and follow His Word this is promised: "Whoever loves me will obey my message. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him" (John 14, 23).

Therefore, I need to be tamed: Loved into an elevated state of new awareness. Just as in everyday life (when big, bad Bill meets the right girl, he suddenly becomes sweet, little William) I need to have my hard heart broken and softened. I need the promised Divine Love to transform me. "I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I will take out the heart of stone from

your bodies and give you a heart of flesh in its place. I will put my spirit in you, and cause you to keep my laws and carefully observe my ordinances" (Ezekiel 36, 26-27).

All these laws and ordinances can be summed up in the two great commandments of the Law: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; . . . you must love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22, 37-39). Then all relationships, with God, neighbor and myself, will be set aright. For as we Love, so we become lovable.

The prophecy of Ezekiel simply confirms that I will be given the power (the Holy Spirit) to do this. When all these things can be going for us, Jesus expects the best out of us. "A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then all will know that you are my disciples" (John 13, 34-35).

In his description of this metamorphosis, Paul seems to enjoy the play on words. From one perspective, he says sin is death; from another, he says we have died to sin. Like the semantics of a double negative (being dead to death), an opposite meaning — that change of heart resulting in a new life of Loving — should be in evidence.

We have died to sin — how then can we go on living in it? For surely you know this: when we were baptized into union with



Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life.

For if we become one with him in dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was. For we know this: our old being has been put to death with Christ on his cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. For when a person dies he is set free from the power of sin. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that Christ has been raised from death and will never die again — death has no more power over him. The death he died was death to sin, once for all; and the life he now lives is life to God. In the same way you are to think of yourselves as dead to sin but alive to God in union with Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6, 2-11)

James presents a similar view in contrasting two different ways of living by posing this question: "Is there a wise and understanding man among you? He is to prove it by his good life, by his good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, then you must not be proud and tell lies against the truth. This kind of wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. For where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil" (James 4, 13-15).

## The Heart of Stone

When a man is bitter, jealous, selfish, resentful, he may as well save his prayers. He is tuned in to the wrong spirit world. The hard heart will act as a resistor between himself and the flowing Love of God's graces. He has cut himself off from God. As the author of Ecclesiasticus writes:

Resentment and anger, indeed these are abominations; and the sinful man will have both of them.

He who seeks revenge will experience the Lord's vengeance, and he will surely keep his sins in remembrance.

Forgive your neighbor the harm he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.

If a man bears hatred against another, can he then ask pardon of the Lord? Showing no mercy to a man like himself, can he then ask forgiveness for his own sins?

If he who is a mere creature of flesh holds resentment, who will forgive him his sins?

Remember your end, and stop hating, remember corruption and death, and live by the commandments.

Remember the commandments, and bear no malice toward your neighbor: remember the covenant of the Highest, and overlook offense.

(Ecclesiasticus 27, 30 - 28, 7)

Again, it is the human that must adjust to the divine instead of seeking to manipulate people. The wise man still embraces his cross with both arms; where could he run to escape it anyway? He realizes from his past experience that this painful ordeal calls to order the

best from him. To be contrite of heart, receptive to the Spirit of Love, has always been the primary objective of every sound spirituality. That is why the Fathers of old would pray for the gift of tears; it is yielding to divine Wisdom.

For "the Wisdom from above is pure, first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And righteousness is the harvest that is produced from the peacemakers planted in peace" (James 3, 17-18). Of course, a man can't do it by himself. But through the Blood of the Lamb all things are possible. By entering the battle of faith, one can be redeemed in that most beautiful image of Jesus: the Image of God's Love. Then there will be sufficient power to follow Paul's advice:

If someone does evil to you, do not pay him back with evil. Try to do what all men consider to be good. Do everything possible, on your part, to live at peace with all men. Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's wrath do it. For the scripture says: "I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord."

Instead, as the scripture says: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; for by doing this you will heap coals on his head." Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

(Rom. 12, 17-21)

When we are overcome with Love, then do we first really become temples of the Holy Spirit. Yet our Lord is con-



stantly looking for a place to dwell; a habitation where He might take up residence and feel at home (Rev. 3, 20). But He requires a heart that is converted and a spirit that is re-born to live in. Then He will saturate this person with His very own presence. We can find an example of this in the patriarchs of old.

## **The God of Jacob**

Jacob had fled to the wilderness. When he lay down to sleep he found a stone to rest his head upon. During that night he had a dream. In this dream Jacob saw a ladder extending all the way from heaven down to that stone where his head was lying. The Lord was at the top of the ladder and Jacob at the bottom; angels were going up and down it continually. All this frantic activity was beyond Jacob's comprehension: he didn't initiate it; he couldn't stop it.

The Lord spoke to him from the top of that ladder and said, in effect: "Jacob, you're busy about many matters, running like crazy, exhausted and getting nowhere. You've been busy doing your own thing to the total thoughtlessness of other people. You're scared because all your coniving has gotten you into trouble. Yet I have determined a purpose for your life from all eternity. But you'll never enter into this plan as long as you are determined to do things your own way.

"Jacob, despite all this, I have decided to bless and use you. I will give you

houses, people and lands as far as you can travel — north, south, east and west. I am your personal God now, and I promise to do these things. I shall always be with you in all your works.”

This seems to be the first time that Jacob had any knowledge of his own personal value and place in God’s providence. Up until this moment he had heard that Yahweh was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac; now he knows experientially that He is also the God of Jacob.

He awakes from the dream startlingly aware of God’s presence. “Why, this place is really strange! The Lord is here, and I didn’t even realize it before. Surely this is the dwelling place of God on earth and the doorway into heaven.” Then he goes back to sleep.

But early in the morning Jacob gets up and pours oil on that stone where the bottom of the ladder had stood. Then he gives it the name “beth El,” a house of God. The stone with the oil penetrating through it is the house of God. Bethel becomes the gate of heaven and God’s true home on earth (I K. 8, 27).

Jacob is equating himself with the stone. God is the oil, and He chooses to become identified with the stone. Just as the oil permeates the stone and becomes one with it, so God identifies with Jacob. He is no longer the distant one. The stone and the oil are no longer separated; God is present in the stone

and Jacob is that stone. He has been partly changed into a new being, initiated into a new community or way of living and will eventually be given a new name, Israel.

As we see in other biblical passages, particularly from the Old Testament, anointing with oil brings the spirit of Yahweh upon a person and causes him to change (I Sam. 10, 10 ff; 16, 13). With the change in life generally goes a new and singularly specific mission. Yet oil is also found to be medicinal, frequently used in the anointing of wounds (Isaiah 1, 6; Lk. 10, 34). We even find it spread on the body as a sign of manifest joy, "to anoint one's face with oil," especially for occasions of celebration (Ps. 104, 15; Matt. 6, 17).

### **Anointing the Sick**

Because of these reasons, oil is used to anoint the sick. This symbolic action calls on the Holy Spirit to permeate the whole body with His healing power of Love, even to the marrow of his bones. The first appeal is made for physical recovery. But a disposition of courage, peace and joy, as a consequence to the indwelling Spirit, is also sought. Finally, to ask that a person be enveloped and immersed with Divine Love — in a particular manner at this moment — is to seek a complete spiritual transformation. It is the direct preparation for a new mission: receiving a fuller participation in the divine nature to perform a heaven-



ly work (II Peter 1, 4). The company of angels and saints provides a new community, and it would be quite appropriate to confer a new name.

Thank God we have left behind those days when the sacrament of anointing was for many only a sign of death, one of those "last rites" enacted for the dying when all hope of living seemed to have disappeared. An "extreme unction," to provide the soul with a sort of holy send-off through a more or less safe passage into an unknown eternity, is a most unfortunate concept of the sacrament for the sick.

Yet another difficulty arises in our pragmatistical cultures of advanced technology today. With the growing interest in healing among Christians comes a danger that anointing and praying over the sick might be *used* as a *mechanistic complement* to secular medicine, or even be tried as a substitute for it in some few extreme cases. This too, could constitute grave misunderstanding.

Healing is a sacrament in such a manner: Jesus is present in today's world, continuing His work of making men whole — physically, psychically, spiritually — and God's kingdom is partially come. Here is tangible evidence that the resurrection power of God's Spirit to raise us from the dead is already becoming operative. Like the blossom on an apple tree, signs and wonders provide a revelation and partial anticipation of the fruit that is still to come. Healing can

indicate that believers have placed one foot into the Life of God's kingdom, into Love: Joy and Peace of the Holy Spirit.

In this valley of tears, suffering and affliction are quite normal; yet their very normalcy exposes a defect in terrestrial existence. They reveal the ultimate and permanent defeat of man in this life, the vanity of vanities in hoarding up treasury on earth and the utter stupidity of a blind humanism. It is a defeat that no partial victories of medicine, however wonderful and truly miraculous, can overcome in the final analysis.

In the life of Jesus, and therefore also in the Body of Christ, suffering and the cross are not removed; only in eschatological times will they be completely eliminated. Healings are temporary manifestations of this kingdom coming where Jesus will reign as King in *full* power; even Lazarus died again! But in Christ our sorrows are changed into victory. When we are crucified with Christ, it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2, 20). "All I want is to know Christ and experience the power of his resurrection; to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life" (Phil. 3, 10).

The defeat of our personal selfishness and sin (death to the old man) brings about the occasion for an elevating change (putting on the Lord Jesus), while opening a way — **THE WAY**,

TRUTH AND LIFE — an entrance into God's kingdom: Loving Communion with the Blessed Trinity. This is the Ultimate Truth and Expression of Healing. "When anyone is joined to Christ he is a new being: the old being is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends, and gave us the task of making others his friends also" (II Cor. 5, 17, 18).

### Persevering Witness

No matter what the cost may be, a Christian continues to pour out Love for his brothers and sisters; he is faithful in his witness to Jesus Christ, even in the baptism of suffering. There always comes a time when everyone who lives and teaches a full Gospel meets with opposition; this is promised by our Master (John 15, 20 ff.). Here comes the real test of a man. Will he become bitter, resentful, obnoxious? Will he fear, run, quit, give up his witness? Or will he continue to go forward in the Spirit, Loving his enemies by the grace of God?

All these questions provoke another sobering thought: how do I know I really love God? Good feelings and heartfelt thanks are not enough; "if you're in love show me" goes the lyrical expression. James says a similar thing regarding faith: "This is how it is with faith: if it is alone and has no action with it, then it is dead" (James 2, 17).

But if you can pour out your heart



and reveal the wonderful things God has done for you and wishes to do for His people through Jesus; if you continue to do so despite the ridicule, insults, injuries that will occur (II Cor. 11, 23-29), and do not get disturbed or tire with the burden; if you do not return evil for evil, but Love while remaining faithful to your witness; then you too can boast like Paul of knowing a little about Jesus, Love and the cross. And hopefully, after returning a small portion unto the Lord for all the good things He has done, He will some day speak to you these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Enter into the joy of your Master" (Matt. 25, 21).

We must all return to our Father through obedience within His Loving plan: the same Father from whom we departed through disobedient sin. He calls us back again and again through Christ and "prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit" (John 15, 2). If we remain faithful, Jesus will be true to His promise: "I reprove and punish all whom I love. . . . To those who win the victory I will give the right to sit by me on my throne, just as I have been victorious, and now sit by my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3, 19-21).

This witness of Love is critical. For it seems to me that the difference between the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the baptism of suffering is something like the following description, even though they

can never be entirely separate. When one is baptized in the Holy Spirit he is immersed in God's Love and given the power to witness for Jesus Christ especially through signs and wonders; when one undergoes the baptism of suffering, he is plunged into Christ's sufferings and given the occasion to demonstrate (witness to or show) God's Love concretely toward his brothers and sisters.

For this reason, then, I fall on my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its true name. I ask God, from the wealth of his glory, to give you power through his Spirit to be strong in your inner selves, and that Christ will make his home in your hearts, through faith. I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love, and that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long and high and deep is Christ's love. Yes, may you come to know his love — although it can never be fully known — and so be completely filled with the perfect fullness of God. To him who is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of, by means of the power working in us: to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, for all time, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3, 14-21)

This is the good Fruit we are supposed to bear in due season through our sufferings. The Love of Christ is strong enough to overcome any temporary defeat. Through Its death itself is turned into a resurrection.

So when what is mortal has been clothed with what is immortal, and when what will die has been clothed with what cannot die, then the scripture will come true:

"Death is destroyed; victory is complete!"

Where, O Death is your victory?

Where, O Death is your power to hurt?

Death gets its power to hurt from sin, and sin gets its power from the Law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 15, 54-57)



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