

DISTRICT OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Society of Saint Pius X

*Saint Mary's House
13 William Street
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30 March 2021

Dear Faithful,

Today is Tuesday in Holy Week, but when most of you read this letter, the sombre tones of Passiontide will already have given way to the joyful notes of Easter. The beautiful liturgy of these days mirrors the drama and abruptness of the actual historical events which they commemorate.

A sudden but subdued joy appears on Holy Thursday night when Our Lord shocked His disciples with remarkable demonstrations of affection. After washing their feet, He worked two tremendous marvels out of love for them. He instituted Holy Orders and the Holy Eucharist which enable Him to abide permanently on earth with His friends throughout all generations. Then, on Good Friday, the liturgy seems to find the limits of its powers of expression to make us taste the tragedy of Our Lord's Passion, that collective rejection of infinite love. Most of Holy Saturday passes with an anticlimactic silence. But thanks to faith, this Saturday also passes in peaceful expectation. Then, as if to show God's disdain for the world's ideas on failure and finality, the Saviour suddenly returns in power and triumph to the scene of His apparent defeat. The liturgy then empties itself in an outpouring of loving loyalty towards Christ and joyous satisfaction at His vindicated honour.

The convictions which the liturgy tries with such earnestness to impress upon our souls this week are the convictions which we need all the year long.

Our Lord truly loves those who believe in Him however unworthy they may be. His love for them is so human that He humbles Himself to wash their feet. His love for them is so divine that it wields omnipotence in order to remain on earth with them forever. It was this love that made His appeal to the heart of Judas as true and genuine as any words He had ever spoken. "*Friend, why have you come?*" His merciful glance towards Peter in the very midst of the tumults of the night trial shows that His first thought is always for His friends even when they fail Him. After the resurrection, without hesitation, He calls by the loving name of "brethren" those who had so recently wavered and abandoned Him. "*Go, tell My brethren that they go into Galilee; there they shall see Me.*"

Because of the loving sacrifice of Christ on Good Friday, the cross is now an element added to the reality of life for all men. The earth knew human suffering long before the first Good Friday. For centuries, the world had been awash with sorrow as sin wrought devastation in the lives of men. But before Good Friday, there was no cross. There was no cross because there was not yet the Saviour, and He is the one great essential. The cross on Calvary, just like suffering itself, would have no significance at all were not for its contact with the Saviour.

But since that dark day on a hill outside Jerusalem, human suffering has a meaning and a power – at least it does when it comes into contact with the Saviour. Mere human suffering has become the cross. Jesus Christ, the Man-God, has come down into this world, and "*all power is given*" to Him. Even suffering itself must now bow down before the King and serve His merciful purposes.

We, His modern disciples, have contact with the Saviour every time that we make an act of faith. As Abbot Vonier reminds us: "It is a favorite idea with Saint Thomas that faith is truly a contact with Christ, a real, psychological contact with Christ ... It is the universal way of coming in touch with the redemption of the Cross; it is a way of approach which is always open." When we who are members of Christ suffer with faith, we truly bear our cross in union with the Saviour. Our sufferings then have a certain authority over the mercy of the Father just as Our Lord's did. Our sufferings then *matter* in the plan of salvation just as Our Lord's did. And all men are called to this faith and union with the Saviour so that their sufferings can help redeem the world.

There is some confusion over this question of carrying one's cross. Good people are often disgusted with themselves because they have a distaste or a loathing for their crosses. Even when they summon up their courage and try to accept them generously, this repugnance remains. They fear that they are not faithful disciples since they feel no eagerness for the cross. But there is a great deal of illusion in this pattern of thinking – an illusion that the devil is only too happy to foster in order to discourage us. Dom Van Zeller addresses this misunderstanding well.

"The cross is not so much a weight which presses on our shoulders; it is rather that quality of suffering ... which comes up through the soles of the feet and spreads exhaustion through every bone and muscle and nerve until it reaches the head and turns even the mind to lassitude and disgust.

But even when we have had the sense to say 'Amen', accepting the cross with as good a grace as we can manage, the weariness of it all goes on as before. *If this were not so we would be in the contradictory position of being able to get rid of our crosses by accepting them.*"

If accepting the cross changed it into something agreeable, it would no longer be a cross. And since the cross remains painful, it naturally provokes sadness and weariness. Therefore, St Therese says:

"Let us suffer without feeling courage. Jesus suffered with sadness. Could we even say that a soul is suffering if it did not experience sadness? And could we then claim that we are suffering generously and nobly ... what an illusion that would be!"

Of course, there is a peace and spiritual joy which comes from accepting to suffer in union with the Saviour. But this remains only in the highest part of our soul and does not remove the repugnance that our human nature feels for the cross itself. Such was even the case for Our Lord. His sufferings were in no way reduced by the joy He experienced in glorifying His Father and saving the human race. What we need, therefore, is not a taste for the cross but the firm resolution to carry it regardless of how we feel. This resolution is best sustained by the confidence which Easter brings. If the Saviour submitted to suffering, it was only in order to become its master. Now suffering *must* serve the Saviour and His friends. As long as charity unites us with Christ, suffering is our servant, and it has no choice but to contribute towards our welfare and the welfare of those whom we love. Therefore, as Monsignor Ronald Knox wrote, the sentiments of Good Friday and those of Easter Sunday must coexist within our souls all the year round. "Let us think of St Mary Magdalene as she went about on that spring morning with all the tragedy of Good Friday in her eyes and all the dauntless courage of Easter on her brow."

Many of you will receive this letter by post, and we are very happy to be able to provide it for you in this way. If you have some other preference, please feel free to let us know by emailing us at webmaster@spx.com.au. Or you may call at 02 9567 1355.

Wishing you all of God's blessings during this time of grace,



Fr Daniel Themann
District Superior