

THE ORDER OF PENANCE AND OF JOY

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IV. PRAYER A SOURCE OF THE TERTIARY'S JOY

"Ask, and you shall receive: that your joy may be full." (John xvi, 24)

How often, dear Tertiaries, is not the beautiful azure sky obscured either wholly or partially by dark clouds, which cast a gloom on the earth. Seldom is the serenity of the heavens unbroken by any clouds. Thus it is with earthly joy. The calm of the soul is disturbed by the daily trials and crosses that come upon us. Is suffering therefore incompatible with joy?

Let us cast our eyes on Mt. Calvary. "The sight of a man hanging in agony upon the cross arouses, at first, no sense of joy, it is true. Yet, there is a well-spring of joy in the sure faith, that the Divine Hero bleeding on the cross is dying in battle against the fiercest foe of joy and of salvation. and conquering as he dies. The cross becomes the symbol of victory and thereby the symbol of joy. Darkness and gloom are dispelled and everywhere is shed the glory of the resurrection. "Thus also is it with the cross and crucifixion in the life of each individual Christian. That a man should take up his cross daily (Luke ix, 23.); that he should not only bear his cross, but crucify the flesh, "the old man," (Gal. v, 24.)—these are not forced figures of speech, but stern demands which certainly do seem likely to lead far away from joy. Yet, the battle to which they summon is waged not against joy, but against joy's worst enemies. The cross obliges us to renounce the apples of Sodom, the wild cherries of sin, which are really no joys at all, but it does not demand a total renunciation of legitimate natural joys; it only insists that they be used in moderation and with a good

intention." (Bishop Keppler.)

God who loves us tenderly, has no other object in sending us sufferings but to make us happy, "You shall be sorrowful," says our Lord to his Apostles, "but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (John xvi, 20.) For this reason we should be patient under sufferings, and should resign ourselves to the will of God. Nay, more, we should rejoice in suffering, and thank God for it. "O Cross, so long desired, so much loved and so long sought after by me, behold I come to thee full of confidence and joy! Do thou separate me from men, and restore me to my Master, so that by means of thee he may receive me, who by means of thee redeemed me." (St. Andrew, Apostle.)

If your sufferings, dear Tertiaries, appear to you heavy and well nigh insupportable, then make use of the means given you by your holy Rule, namely prayer. Prayer is a potent help in all trials and tribulations. Indeed, there is a deeper meaning than is commonly supposed in the counsel of St. James, the Apostle: "Is any of you sad? Let him pray." (James, v, 13.) St. Chrysostom calls prayer "a refuge in every sorrow, a principle of constant pleasure," and St. Nilus calls it "a charm against sadness and depression of soul." The Holy Ghost is truly a comforter, who imparts joy to the heart in prayer. Well could, therefore, the Psalmist exclaim, "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet!" (Ps. xxxiii, 9.) Bishop Keppler says, "To pray means to relieve one's heart, to bid care begone, to breathe out misery and distress, to breathe in the pure mountain air and the energy of another world."

Your holy Rule offers you this means, when it obliges you to say daily "Twelve Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory be to the Father, unless prevented from doing so by ill health." (Chap. ii, 6.) Observe this part of your holy Rule diligently and devoutly and you will soon experience joys hitherto perhaps unknown to you. Through prayer your sufferings if not abated will, at least, be accompanied with many inner consolations; rays of joy will appear between the beams of the cross; roses of happiness will blossom amidst the crown of thorns; in a word, sorrow and sadness will disappear as clouds driven before the winds.

But Tertiaries must not be satisfied with this obligatory prayer. A model Tertiary will pray often, thus fulfilling the command of Christ: "We ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke, xviii. 1.) But how is this possible?

According to St. Thomas, whatever we do for the honor of God is true prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is the raising of our hearts and minds to God. But we can not do anything for the honor of God without raising our minds to him, and consequently without praying. Our Blessed Savior himself confirms his statement; for he once said to St. Catherine of Siena in a vision, "Everything that is done from love of God or charity to one's neighbor may be called a continual prayer. He who ceases not to do good ceases not to pray."

The easiest and most effectual way of fulfilling this commandment of praying always, is to have a good intention in all our works—to do all things for the greater glory of God, for the attainment of our eternal salvation, or as atonement for our sins. In this manner one will experience the joy contained in persevering prayer; a joy that never

diminishes, because it has its beginning and its end in God, the source of all joy.

The Tertiary Rule admonishes you to devout and grateful prayer: "They will neither sit down to table nor rise from it without first devoutly and gratefully invoking God." (Chap. ii, 3.) Devotion and gratitude are two important factors in the procurement of joy. Your prayers must, therefore, be a prayer of the heart, and of a grateful heart. Bishop Keppler sums up the necessary relationship between joy and gratitude in these words: "Indeed, if we develop in ourselves the sense of gratitude, and for all the good things daily bestowed on us give hearty thanks to the Heavenly Father 'from whom comes every best gift' (James, i, 17.), then we shall never again be without joy, for along the path of life we shall discover new joy constantly blossoming, and perceive perennial joys previously unnoticed. What a man prizes, he is grateful for, he knows how to value and esteem."

St. Paul also expresses this thought when he admonishes us: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice," and immediately adds the exhortation to "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." (Phil. iv, 6) Truly, thanksgiving is an easy way of obtaining joy, and for that reason we should be all the more ready to make use of this means. We should be thankful for small favors as well as for great graces. Nothing makes us more pleasing to God and insures the receiving of further gifts from God than the spirit of gratitude. We should be thankful also to our fellow men, and our joy resultant therefrom will be great indeed. "Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts wherein also you are called in one body; and be ye thankful." (Col. iii, 15.)