

(English translation)

November – December 1961

Jesus Crucified and Forsaken

Just as all of Christianity is a mystery of love and suffering, so too the truly vital elements in our movement are love and suffering.

And just as in Christianity love generally overcomes suffering and life is victor over death, so it is, also, in the Work of Mary.

When we started out on this new life we sometimes wondered what the most beautiful thing in the world might be: whether the stars, or flowers, or children, or people of genius, or sunsets And we arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful thing is love, the maternal, fraternal and conjugal forms of love that God has placed in the human heart.

Jesus himself raised fraternal love to a supernatural level, making of all Christians a single brotherhood. The love of a mother seemed to us even more beautiful, since, purified by sorrow, it is more lasting and more sacred to the human heart. Yet conjugal love appeared to excel over almost every other kind of love, for it makes it possible for two creatures to abandon all other natural bonds of affection in order to found a new family.

Love is certainly a wonderful thing. "But - we wondered - what must God be like who created it? And shall we, who have left all things for his sake, be able to experience, in this life, something of the love that is God?"

...

One day we heard a priest, speaking on the suffering of Christ, say that perhaps the moment when Jesus suffered most was on Calvary when he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Commenting on these words when we got home we decided, in our desire to live well the one life we had, to choose Jesus forsaken - as we called him in his suffering - as our Model.

And from that moment on, he, his face, his mysterious cry, seemed to color every moment of suffering in our lives.

We too, like everybody else, at times experienced spiritual states of affliction that might be described as darkness, aridity, a sense of failure, loneliness, the heaviness of our own human nature, of our sins.

But was not Jesus, at the ninth hour, immersed in a blackness so thick that it infinitely surpassed any feelings of darkness that we might ever have?

And was not this aridity so great that his divine soul seemed temporarily deprived of the loving presence of the Father?

He, the victorious one, never appeared such a great failure as at that moment. But it was then that he, the Son of God, indivisibly one with him, reunited all the children to their Father by paying the price of this most terrible desolation. He, the completely innocent one, took upon his shoulders the weight of all our sins, drawing down upon himself and absorbing, like a divine lightning conductor, the full force of God's justice.

While at first we had sluggishly dragged ourselves through moments of suffering, waiting for something unexpected to turn up that would help to make the difficulty pass, now, in similar circumstances, seeing our little sorrows in the shadow of his, we stood firm, withdrawing into the depths of our souls so as to offer this suffering to Jesus, happy to add our little droplet to the sea of his pain. An

then we would continue to live moment by moment, wholeheartedly performing his will, as for example, by loving the neighbor that circumstances brought our way.

Doing this, our spiritual darkness, the sense of failure, aridity, all these disappeared, and we began to understand how dynamically divine is the Christian life, which knows nothing of emptiness, or the cross, or suffering, except as things that pass, and which enables us to experience the fullness of life, meaning resurrection and light and hope, even in the midst of tribulations.

...

For all of us, then, Jesus forsaken was the key that invariably opened the way to union with God.

He was also the means whereby we remedied any small imperfections in the unity that had been established among us through "a constant mutual charity."

"Where charity and love are, there is God." Where love and charity are wanting, therefore, God is not present. And there were times when his consoling presence, which gave meaning to the new life we had set out upon, casting a new light on even the smallest acts performed out of love for him, clarifying for us the things that happened in the present and making us see the future as bright and beckoning... there were times when all this vanished. This fullness of joy that results when unity is achieved among people was lost as a consequence of the pride or egoism of one or another, of an attachment to one's own ideas or belongings, or because of a failure in charity.

Our souls would then experience confusion. They reeled about in the dark, and any progress made up till then seemed unavailing. It was as if the sun of our luminous unity had set.

Then, only the memory of Jesus in his profound abandonment, of the darkness in which his soul had been engulfed, gave us hope that all was not lost. On the contrary, our present state, being one of suffering, could actually be pleasing to God if offered to him out of love. And we strove to do this, courageously bringing about unity again by asking pardon and taking the initiative, even when it was the other who had something against us. The Gospel warned us that not even our offering at the altar was pleasing to God in a climate void of reciprocal charity.

So the sun would shine once more in our little community, the presence of Jesus among those who are united in his name.

Through love for Jesus forsaken, light and peace reigned not only in our souls, but also in all the souls of all those who, being lonely, disorientated, orphaned, disillusioned, failures in life, downcast, desperate, helpless or caught up in a meaningless existence, reminded us, in one way or another, of him whom we had chosen.

Such persons were sought out by the members of the Movement, who tried to share with them the troubles that filled their hearts. And then, at the right moment, they would speak to them of Jesus, of his infinite love, of his favor for the categories of people mentioned in the beatitudes, of the privilege that was theirs in being able to help him carry his cross, for their own good and that of humanity. They also explained how one must offer Him personal sorrows, always recognizing in them, the countenance of Christ. Had not Theresa of Lisieux, when she first discovered the sickness from which she eventually died, exclaimed: "Here is the Spouse"?

In this way we gradually learned, we and all our friends, that suffering is always sacred. We were not merely to put up with it, but to actually embrace it.

So our solitude was filled with God, and with the presence of the many others who by then belonged to the Movement. In Christ forsaken, souls found an orientation for their lives. In contact with people who were all trying to do God's will, orphans, for example, found not only brothers and sisters, but

fathers and mothers. The disillusioned and the weary, those who have been defeated by life, found an answer to their problems. The why of each one found an answer in his great why.

With the Incarnation, Jesus was right down at our own level; but on the cross he was crushed, and in his abandonment he seemed to be altogether annihilated. Acting as a divine, inclined plane, he made it possible for any person on earth, whatever their moral and spiritual state, to ascend to God's divine Majesty, on condition that they turn to Christ and following the example of Christ, transform the whole of their oppressive burden of sorrow into the pure gold of love.

Thus, in the course of time, many people, by means of our Movement too, have understood or experienced the truth of the words of Jesus: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

And every morning we, so as to be true Christians, repeated to ourselves on rising: "Because you are forsaken..." as if to say: "You, Lord, crucified, are the reason for my life, under whatever form you appear. I will not shirk this encounter with you. No, I will consider it the most precious moment of the day, because it's in suffering, offering our pain, that we are certain in loving God with pure love."

...

This is our ideal: Jesus crucified and forsaken, in us and outside of us, in the whole world that is waiting to be consoled and comforted.

From our limited experience we have learned that there is no true Christian life except in those who have fully embraced the cross, for ours is one of the innumerable possible actualizations of the words of Jesus: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

But by way of comfort to those who embark for the first time upon this divine adventure, we can say that, in a small way, we too, like our giant brothers the saints, have experienced the truth that in casting oneself into the arms of the cross, one finds not only suffering, but love, the love that is the life of God himself within us.

(Cf. *That All Men Be One, Origins and Life of the Focolare Movement*, New City Press, New York 1974 pp. 65-78)