

11 October 2003—Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Carmelites,

It is good to be back in Australia after a holiday that took me to India, Ireland and the USA, from the 19th of August to the 19th of September.

In India I landed in Chennai, formerly called Madras, and went on to Madurai where Fr. Thomas Blute met me and drove me the three hours to Palayamkottai in Tamil Nadu. Although there are some Catholics in the north the highest concentrations of Catholics in India are in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The small city of Palayamkottai is where the society has a priory that is responsible for all of India. Fr. François Chazel of the Society of St. Pius X and two traditional Indian priests are at the priory with Fr. Blute. There are another two priests helping them in various villages. The chapel is at present a very large room above a sawmill which is not ideal. Fr. Blute's next project will be to build a church. They have a piece of land several acres in size where the priory and a youth hostel are. The boys live there and go to various schools. They receive religion and help with their schoolwork at the hostel, as well as an ordered life with time for work and play. The schools that they attend are generally not good. However, the Society of St. Pius X will not be able to open a school in the near future.

This land is dominated by paganism and idolatry. The people do not know God and thus cannot love and serve him. They need missionaries, priests and religious, to bring them the light of faith. However, naturally speaking they are more virtuous than the west; there are fewer violent crimes and less public immorality.

I also visited the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle, where I prayed for all of your intentions. I prayed for the Holy Father, Bishop Fellay and the Society of St. Pius X, the Carmelites and all traditional orders, and our work throughout the world. Through the intercession of this great Apostle may many recognise that Our Lord Jesus Christ is "My Lord and my God."

October 19th is Mission Sunday. We should do our best to support the missions with our prayers, alms and sacrifices. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Holy Face is the patroness of the missions because of her great love for souls. By working toward the conversion of the infidel we participate in the mission of Holy Mother Church. At the minimum we should frequently ask the intercession of St. Thérèse for the work of the missionaries throughout the world.

I was only in Ireland for a very short time, but did visit Newry, in Co. Down, Cashel and Cork as well as our priory in Dun Laoghaire. Fr. Louis-Paul Dubrœucq was preparing to leave as he is going to have a sabbatical year at the Carmel in Belgium. Presumably he will pray for the Carmelite order while there. Fr. Ramon Angles, formerly rector at St. Mary's Academy and College in Kansas, USA has replaced him. Poor Ireland has imitated Esau and traded their Catholic heritage for the mess of European pottage.

From Ireland I went to St. Mary's for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of its opening or I should say re-opening by the Society of St. Pius X. It was originally opened by the Jesuits and also served as a bishopric and a seminary during its career. The celebration was also a going away party for Fr. Angles and a welcome to Fr. Vincente Griego who was to replace him. Bishop Fellay attended along with about twenty-five priests most of whom had done their schooling there. There was a pontifical Mass, a very fine concert, an awards ceremony, a reading of a long proclamation from the governing of Kansas which ultimately proclaimed September 3rd 2003 "St. Mary's Academy and College Day" in the state of Kansas, a bar-b-que picnic with games for the children, and a grand fireworks displayed that was more spectacular than the community 4th of July fireworks. The faith is alive in St. Mary's let us pray that it remains a beacon of light in the darkness of North America.



The retreat for the members of the Third Order of Mt. Carmel will be at Holy Cross Seminary in Goulburn. It will start with Mass at 5:00 pm on Sunday the 29th of February and end at 9:00 am on Saturday the 6th of March, 2004.

We are obliged to clean the seminary before and after the retreat. Those who can arrive early and/or remain afterward should volunteer to help with this work.

Members unable to attend this retreat should arrange to attend another retreat offered by a traditional priest during 2004.

October 15th St. Teresa of Avila, General absolution with plenary indulgence today.

October 26th Feast of Christ the King. Pontifical Mass, Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, conference by Bishop Fellay, and solemn Vespers in Rockdale.

November 1st All Saints Day, General absolution with a plenary indulgence.

November 3rd All Soul's Day

November 5th Relic of Carmel Saints

November 14th All Saints of the Carmelite Order, General absolution, plenary indulgence.

November 15th All Souls of the Carmelite Order

November 21st Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, General absolution, plenary indulgence.

November 24th St. John of the Cross, General absolution with plenary indulgence.



THE REASONS FOR SUFFERING

Suffering held an important place in the life of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. She did more than accept it; she passionately loved it. This love of suffering, like her other virtues, was the effect and, as it were, the natural prolongation of her love of God. In order that divine Love might take possession of her soul and develop within her, she had pushed her practice of renunciation to the limit. Desiring to respond to the love of Christ, she had consecrated herself without reservation to the love of her neighbour. But a love that has its source in the divine Furnace of Love,

does not stop there. It desires to give itself in complete immolation. It cries out for suffering so the self might be entirely consumed by it.

This had happened in the life of Jesus. This was also the aspiration of St. Thérèse. She wanted to suffer and sacrifice herself so that she might love more and cause Love to be loved by souls.

We know that suffering was not a part of God's original plan for man. He had protected us by a preternatural gift against the suffering that might result from our nature and from earthly conditions. Suffering, then, is a consequence of sin. In God's wisdom, however, it has been transformed into a means of sanctification, a proof of love, an instrument for the salvation of souls. It is, thus, one of the most admirable provisions of divine mercy.

God, in His love, decreed to save us from the eternal loss which we had brought on ourselves, and to restore, according to an even more magnificent plan, the order we had destroyed. Now, it was through the voluntary Passion of His Son that God chose to accomplish this merciful design. Suffering and the cross thereby acquired an inestimable dignity. They were to have their specific role in the supernatural order, in every effort of the soul towards its conformity with Christ. Nothing great would be accomplished without them. Until then they had inspired nothing but fear and horror. Henceforth, they were to become objects of desire for all loving souls, one of the best means of manifesting one's love for God.

God has bestowed the gift of suffering on His Son. He would likewise bestow that grace on those whom He loved in a special way. "Far from complaining to Jesus because He sends us crosses," wrote St. Thérèse, "I cannot fathom the infinite love that prompted Him to deal with us in this way." "Suffering is, of all the things God can give us, the best gift. He gives it only to His chosen friends."

However, because suffering and the cross have become objects of love, it does not follow that they no longer cause pain, that crosses have ceased to be crosses. They continue to be a load on our nature and may even make us cry out in anguish. A suffering that is not felt is suffering no longer, and it is hard to see how, under such conditions, it could still fulfil its special Christian role.

St. Thérèse had learned the meaning of suffering. She was only fifteen when she wrote to her sister Céline: "What is this sweet Friend doing? Does He not notice our anguish and the weight that oppresses us? Where is He and why does He not come to console us? If He is 'begging' for this sadness we suffer, it must be because He needs it.... It grieves Him because He sees the need of filling us with sadness. Our suffering never makes Him happy. He sends it to us and, as it were, turns away His head while so doing, but suffering is a thing that is necessary for US."

***1. Firstly, Suffering is necessary as a means to detach us,
to purify us and dispose us for union with Jesus.***

God has loved us to the extent of desiring that we should become conformed to the image of His Son and be united with Him. But because we are miserable, stained with sin and immersed in earthly things, we cannot attain this end without a perfect purification of our soul and the acquisition of the virtues that make union with Christ possible. Now, only physical or mental suffering penetrates sufficiently to the core of our being to purify it and to enrich it so as to enable us to become similar to Christ.

"Suffering," said St. Thérèse, "is necessary to detach us from the earth and make us look up higher than this world," to detach us "from all that is created," "from all that is not Jesus, and to purify us, to make us acquire the virtues and particularly charity. I have often remarked," she said, "that suffering makes us good; it makes us indulgent towards others, because suffering brings us nearer to the good Lord."

Suffering is especially necessary to make our heart turn to Jesus alone, for "we must suffer much if we want Him to possess us completely." It is suffering which makes us resemble Him. A spouse of Jesus must resemble Jesus. And He is covered with blood and crowned with thorns."

2. Suffering is also a matter of love. It is God's proof that He loves us.

"Jesus tries those whom He loves," said St. Thérèse. "Suffering is the greatest proof He can give us of His tenderness towards us. He gives it only to His chosen friends. He even increases it according to the greater measure of our love for Him."

Suffering is also the response of our love to His love. "God is admirable," wrote our Saint, "but He is, above all, lovable. Let us then, love Him! Let us love Him to the extent of being ready to suffer for Him whatever He may wish us to suffer, even the sufferings of the soul." "Is there any greater joy than to suffer out of love of God?"

But we owe a special debt to Christ, for He emptied Himself and sacrificed Himself for us, and because, in spite of so much love, He receives so little love in return: "Jesus," says St. Thérèse, "became poor that we might practice charity towards Him. He longs for our love and begs for it... He looks for souls who will console Him but finds none... He, as it were, puts Himself at our mercy." "Let us, therefore, make our life a continual sacrifice, a martyrdom of love to console Jesus. He asks only a glance, a sigh, but a glance and a sigh that are for Him alone!" "What a joy to be able to suffer for Him whom we love!"

3. The third reason for suffering is that without it we cannot reach heaven.

Again, the reward in heaven will be proportioned to the measure and quality of our suffering here below.

From the day when St. Thérèse had read in a work of Father Arminjon the glowing description of the reception which God has in store for those who have laboured and suffered for Him, suffering had become dear to her. If it be necessary to suffer and weep in order to reach heaven," she said, "well, I want to suffer whatever may please Jesus!" "If Jesus, in spite of His love for us, makes us suffer; if He does not spare us, it is because He looks beyond time, because He already beholds us in the state of glory. He rejoices in our eternal beatitude. He so greatly desires to give us a rich recompense! He knows that suffering is the only means to prepare us so that we may know Him as He knows Himself, and thus, make us gods. She wrote, likewise, to Mother Agnès: "I desire only one thing as long as I shall be in Carmel and that is to suffer always for Jesus. Life passes so quickly. How much better to have a beautiful crown at the expense of a little pain than to have an ordinary one without pain. Think of it, for one pain borne with joy, I shall love God more perfectly for all eternity!"

Hence, her firm resolution: "Let us embrace suffering, otherwise Jesus will not be able to say 'now it is my turn to give you something.'"

4. Finally, suffering is necessary for the salvation of souls.

"Without shedding of blood," writes St. Paul, "there is no remission of sins." For our salvation Jesus 'annihilated' Himself and suffered the most excruciating pain. He allowed Himself to be crushed by sorrow and died covered with blood flowing from numerous wounds.

But the work of redemption is not finished. It will last as long as there are souls to be saved. This work Christ continues through the members of His Mystical Body. I fill up in my flesh for his body," says St. Paul, "what is lacking of the suffering of Christ." Christ has suffered. Christ's members must now take their share of suffering. By that means they will cause Christ's merits and satisfactions to be applied to souls.

St. Thérèse had a profound comprehension of the role of suffering in the work of saving souls. It is only suffering," she wrote, "that can beget souls for Jesus." She recognized in that co-

operation which our divine Saviour expects of us, a special love for us: "Jesus," she said, "has for us a love so incomprehensible, so delicate, that He does not want to do anything without associating us with Him. He wants us to participate with Him in the work of saving souls. The Creator of the universe waits for prayers, for the immolation made by a poor insignificant soul, to save other souls which, like that soul, were bought at the price of all His blood." "Oh! how happy I would be, if, at the moment of my death, I were able to offer my soul to Jesus! There would be one soul which had been saved from hell and which would praise God for all eternity!" Hence, she had scarcely entered Carmel when she gave away all she had without counting the cost: her actions, prayers, sufferings; and she never made any reservations; she "even exhausted her very substance in that gift."

Children have a natural horror for suffering and their capacity of bearing it is limited. But St. Thérèse was not an ordinary child. The Holy Ghost had taken possession of her from her early childhood and progressively enlightened and strengthened her.

She had begun by simply accepting suffering, but after a short time she fell passionately in love with it and longed for it. She tells us that "at first she had not realized that it is necessary to suffer much if we want to attain holiness." But the trials which very soon came to afflict her, made her understand that "it is only the complete immolation of self that can be called love, and it is by means of suffering that we sanctify ourselves."



We naturally with our sense of the Faith see the truth and the beauty in this doctrine. To put it into practise is our great work. How often do we shrink in horror from suffering? We want to avoid the little crosses. Here is an opportunity to practise charity toward someone that I do not like, perhaps, someone who is not a good person. Now I need to practise patience, e.g., when driving the car, or when someone asks something of me. Today, I am cold; tomorrow, it is hot. Do I embrace these opportunities? Most of us do not. However, if we want to be disciples of Our Lord we must: *deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Jesus*. We cannot follow Jesus without the cross.

If we are given greater sufferings, such as a painful illness or a great moral cross we must strive to accept these generously as tokens of the love of God for us. It is a great privilege to be given a share in His cross. We can also be confident that Our Blessed Lord will not send us such sufferings without also giving us the grace we need to bear them patiently. Likewise, we must not have anxiety over tomorrow's sufferings. Sufficient for today are the sufferings God allows us to undergo today. We have not yet received the grace to bear tomorrows' cross therefore, we are unable to carry it today.

Resolution: To think often on eternity. Think how great will the reward me for embracing a spirit of sacrifice and acquiring a taste for suffering. It was the contemplation of death that converted St. Francis Borgia (feastday Oct. 10) from a life of ordinary Catholicism to the life of sanctity. It can likewise convert us. Let us cooperate with the graces God sends us and strive to learn to love suffering.

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Edward F. MacDonald