

# Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

## This Month's Reading:

### *Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort*

Dear Father,  
June is the month of the Sacred Heart, and so it seems a good occasion to meditate about the love Jesus showed to us while hanging on the Cross, during His Passion and Death.

This month, I would like to share with you some extracts of the *Letter to the Friends of the Cross*, written by Saint Louis de Montfort. Due to the length of this bulletin, I only chose some paragraphs, but the full text is available on many websites, and its reading and meditation could really change our life. In these paragraphs, he will talk about all the graces and benefits that we can

find in our crosses and sufferings. Our daily cross, far from being a punishment or something repulsive which we should avoid, is the greatest gift that Jesus can give to the souls he loves. Being crucified with Christ is what Saint Paul longed for, because a good servant should desire to share the fate of his Master.

But experience often tells us that crosses and sufferings are not easy to bear, so we must learn how to do it well. The Saint says that this is an art, and like all other arts, it must be learned. According to him, the secret of carrying the cross with joy is only one: the remembrance of Christ crucified.

And we, as priests, cannot abandon our Master to carry his cross alone while we hide or complain about ours. As it happened 2,000 years ago, Jesus still needs souls ready to become like Simon of Cyrene. He wants to share his cross with us, and we cannot refuse to

accept the challenge. But we must do it as real "*Friends of the Cross*", with love and generosity, without complaint or sadness.

God bless you!

Fr. Tomás Ravaioli, IVE  
*LCI Director*

## Author: Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

Born poor. Studied in Paris, France, and ordained in 1700. While a seminarian he delighted in researching the writings of Church Fathers, Doctors and Saints as they related to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom he was singularly devoted.

Under Mary's inspiration, he founded the Daughters of Divine Wisdom, a religious institute of women devoted to the care of the destitute, and a brother organization, the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. During this work, he began his apostolate of preaching the Rosary and authentic Marian devotion. He preached Mary everywhere and to everyone. A member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, Saint Louis was one of the greatest apostles of the Rosary in his day, and by means his miraculously inspiring book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, he is still so today; the most common manner of reciting the Rosary is the method that originated with Saint Louis's preaching. In 1715, he founded the missionaries known as the Company

of Mary or Montfort Missionaries.

His greatest contribution to the Church and world is Total Consecration to the Blessed Virgin. He propagated this in his day by preaching and after his own death by his other famous book *True Devotion to Mary*. Consecration to Mary is for Saint Louis the perfect manner of renewing one's baptismal promises. His spirituality has been espoused by millions, especially Pope John Paul II, who has consecrated not only himself but every place he has visited as pope. In *True Devotion to Mary*, Saint Louis prophesied that the army of souls consecrated to Mary will be Her instrument in defeating the Devil and his Antichrist.

The cause for his declaration as a Doctor of the Church is now being pursued.



# The Practices of Christian Perfection

*From the Letter to the Friends of the Cross*

*By Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort*

Christian holiness consists in this:

1. **Resolving to become a saint:** *“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine;”*
2. **Self-denial:** *“Let him renounce himself;”*
3. **Suffering:** *“Let him take up his cross;”*
4. **Acting:** *“Let him follow me.”*

## 1. Resolving to Become a Saint: *“If anyone wants to follow me”*

*“If anyone,”* says our Lord, to point out the small number of chosen ones willing to conform themselves to Christ crucified by carrying their cross. Their number is so small that we would be dumbfounded if we knew it.

It is so small that there is scarcely one in ten thousand, as has been revealed to several saints, including St. Simon Stylites, St. Basil, St. Ephrem and others. It is so small that, should it please God to gather them together, he would have to call them one by one as he did of old through his prophet, *“You will be gathered one by one;”* one from this country, one from that province.

*“If anyone wants,”* if anyone has a genuine desire, a determination, not prompted by nature, habit, self-love, self-interest, or human respect, but by the all-conquering grace of the Holy Spirit, which is not given to everyone. *“It is not given to all men to know this mystery.”*

In fact, only a few people have the knowledge of how to live out the mystery of the Cross in daily life. For a man to climb Mount Calvary and allow himself to be nailed to the cross with Christ in the midst of his own people, he must be courageous, heroic, resolute; one who is close to God, and treats with indifference the world and the devil, his own body and his own desires; one who is determined to leave all things,

to undertake all things, and to suffer all things for Christ.

You must realise, my dear Friends of the Cross, that should there be anyone among you without this determination, he is only walking on one foot, flying with one wing. He is not worthy to be one of your company, since he is not worthy to be called a Friend of the Cross, which we must, like Jesus, love “with a generous mind and a willing heart.”

It only needs one half-hearted member to spoil the whole group, like a mangy sheep. If such a one has entered your fold through the evil door of the world, then in the name of Christ crucified drive him out as you would a wolf from the flock.

*“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine.”* If anyone wants to follow me who so humbled and emptied myself that I became a worm rather than a man; who came into the world only to embrace the Cross, to set it in my heart, to love it from my youth, to long for it all the days of my life, to carry it joyfully, preferring it to all the joys and delights that heaven and earth could offer, and not being content till I had died in its divine embrace.

## 2. Self-denial:

*“Let him renounce himself”*

If anyone, therefore, wants to follow me thus abased and crucified, he must

glory, as I did, only in the poverty, humiliations and sufferings of my Cross. *“Let him renounce himself.”*

Excluded, then, from the company of the Friends of the Cross are those who take pride in their sufferings; the worldly-wise, the intellectuals and the sceptics who are attached to their own ideas and puffed up with their own talents. Away from you those endless talkers who make a great show but produce nothing but vanity. Away from you those so-called devout Catholics who in their pride display the

selfsufficiency of proud Lucifer wherever they go, saying, “I am not like the rest of men;” who cannot endure being blamed without making some excuse, being attacked without answering back, being humbled without exalting themselves.

Be careful not to admit into your society those delicate and sensitive people who are afraid of the slightest pin-prick, who cry out and complain at the least pain, who know nothing of the hair-shirt, the discipline or other instruments of penance, and who mingle, with their fashionable devotions, a most refined fastidiousness and a most studied lack of mortification.

## 3. Suffering:

*“Let him take up his cross”*

*“Let him take up his cross,”* the one that is his. Let that man (or woman)

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so rare “*far beyond the price of pearls,*” take up his cross joyfully, embrace it lovingly, and carry it courageously on his shoulders, his own cross, and not that of another - his own cross which I, in my wisdom, designed for him in every detail of number, measure and weight; his own cross which I have fashioned with my own hands and with great exactness as regards its four dimensions of length, breadth, thickness and depth; his own cross, which out of love for him I have carved from a piece of the one I bore to Calvary; his own cross, which is the greatest gift I can bestow upon my chosen ones on earth; his own cross, whose thickness is made up of the loss of one’s possessions, humiliations, contempt, sufferings, illnesses and spiritual trials, which come to him daily till his death in accordance with my providence; his own cross, whose length consists of a certain period of days or months enduring slander, or lying on a sick-bed, or being forced to beg, or suffering from temptations, dryness, desolation, and other interior trials; his own cross, whose breadth is made up of the most harsh and bitter circumstances brought about by relatives, friends, servants; his own

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and not drag it,  
or shake it off,  
or lighten it, or  
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without complaint  
or grumbling*

cross, whose depth is made up of the hidden trials I shall inflict on him without his being able to find any comfort from other people, for they also, under my guidance, will turn away from him and join with me in making him suffer.

“*Let him take up,*” that is, let him carry his cross and not drag it, or shake it off, or lighten it, or hide it. Instead, let him lift it on high and carry it without impatience or annoyance, without intentional complaint or grumbling, without hesitation or concealment, without shame or human respect.

“*Let him take it up*” and set it on his brow, saying with St. Paul, “*The only thing I can boast about is the Cross*

*of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Let him carry it on his shoulders like our Lord, that it may become the source of his victories and the sceptre of his power: “*Dominion is laid upon his shoulders.*”

Let him set it in his heart, where it may, like the burning bush of Moses, burn day and night with the pure love of God without being consumed!

“*The cross*”: let him carry it, for nothing is so necessary, so beneficial, so agreeable, or so glorious as to suffer something for Jesus Christ.

*Nothing is so necessary*

Dear Friends of the Cross, we are all sinners; there is not one of us who has not deserved hell, and I more than anyone. Our offences have to be punished either in this world or in the next. If we suffer for them now, we shall not suffer for them after death. If we willingly accept punishment for them, this punishment will be an act of God's love; for it is mercy which holds sway and chastises in this world, and not strict justice. This punishment will be light and temporary, accompanied by consolation and merit, and followed by rewards both here and in eternity.

But if the punishment due for our sins is put off till the next world, then it will be God's avenging justice, which puts everything to fire and sword, which will inflict the punishment, a dreadful, indescribable punishment: "*Who*

*understands the power of your anger?*" Judgement without mercy, without relief, without merit, without limit and without end. Yes, without end. That serious sin you committed in a few brief moments, that deliberate evil thought which now escapes your memory, that word carried away by the wind, that brief action against the law of God - they shall all be punished for eternity, in the company of the devils in hell, so long as God is God. And this avenging God will have no pity on your torments, on your cries and tears, violent enough to cleave the rocks. To suffer forever, without merit, without mercy, and without end.

Do we think of this, my dear brothers and sisters, when we have to suffer some trial in this world? How fortunate we are to be able to exchange a never-ending and unprofitable punishment for a temporary and rewarding one just by bearing our cross with patience! How many of our debts are still unpaid! How many sins have we committed which, despite a sincere confession and heartfelt contrition, will have to be atoned for in purgatory for many years, simply because in this world we contented ourselves with a few slight penances!

Ah, let us settle our debts with good grace in this life by cheerfully carrying our cross. In the next, a strict account is demanded down to the last penny, to the last idle word. If we were able to snatch from the devil the book of death in which he has entered all our sins and the punishment due to them,



what a heavy debt we should find, and how delighted we should be to suffer for long years on earth rather than a single day in the world to come!

Friends of the Cross, do you not flatter yourselves that you are, or desire to become, the friends of God? Well then, resolve to drink the cup that you must drink in order to become his friends: *“They drank the cup of the Lord and became the friends of God.”* Benjamin, the beloved son of Jacob, was given the cup, while

his other brothers received nothing but wheat. The beloved disciple of Christ, so dear to his Master’s heart, went up to Calvary and drank of his cup. *“Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?”* To desire God’s glory is excellent, but to desire and pray for it without resolving to suffer all things is both foolish and extravagant: *“You do not know what you are asking...”* *“We must experience many hardships before we enter the kingdom of heaven.”* To enter this kingdom you must suffer many crosses and tribulations.

Rightly you glory in being God’s children. You should glory, then, in the correction your heavenly Father has given you and will give you in the future, for he chastises all his children. If you are not included among his beloved children, you are, alas, included among those who are lost, as St. Augustine points out. He also tells us, “The one who does not mourn in this world like a stranger and a pilgrim will not rejoice

in the world to come as a citizen of heaven.”

If your heavenly Father does not send you some worthwhile crosses from time to time, it is because he no longer cares about you and is angry with you; he is treating you as an outsider, no longer belonging to his family and deserving his protection, or as an illegitimate child, who, having no claim to a share of the inheritance, deserves neither care nor correction.

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Friends of the Cross, disciples of a crucified God, the mystery of the Cross is a mystery unknown to the Gentiles, rejected by the Jews, and despised by heretics and bad Catholics. But it is the great mystery you must learn to practice in the school of Christ, and which can only be learnt from him. You will look in vain in all the schools of ancient times for a philosopher who taught it; in vain you will appeal to the senses or to reason to throw some light on it. It is only Jesus, through his all-powerful grace, who can teach you this mystery and give you the ability to appreciate it.

Strive then to become proficient in this all-important science under your great Master, and you will understand all other sciences, for it contains them all in an eminent degree. It is our natural and supernatural philosophy, our divine and mystic theology, our philosopher’s stone, which by patience transforms the basest metals into precious ones, the



bitterest pains into delight, poverty into riches, the most profound humiliations into glory. The one among you who knows best how to carry his cross, even though in other things he does not know A from B, is the most learned of all.

The great St. Paul returned from the third heaven, where he learned mysteries hidden even from the angels, and he proclaimed that he did not know, nor did he want to know anything but Christ crucified. Rejoice, then, you ordinary Christian, man or woman, without any schooling or intellectual abilities, for if you know how to suffer cheerfully, you know more than a doctor of Sorbonne University who does not know how to suffer as you do.

You are the members of Christ, a wonderful honour indeed, but one which entails suffering. If the Head is crowned with thorns, can the members expect to be crowned with roses? If the Head is jeered at and covered with dust on the road to Calvary, can the members expect to be sprinkled with perfumes on a throne? If the Head has no pillow on which to rest, can the members expect to recline on feathers and down? That would be unthinkable!

No, no, my dear Companions of the Cross, do not deceive yourselves. Those Christians you see everywhere, fashionably dressed, fastidious in manner, full of importance and dignity, are not real disciples, real members of Christ

crucified. To think they are would be an insult to our thorn-crowned Head and to the truth of the Gospel. How many so-called Christians imagine they are members of our Saviour when in reality they are his treacherous persecutors, for while they make the sign of the cross with their hand, in their hearts they are its enemies!

If you are guided by the same spirit, if you live with the same life as Jesus, your thorn-crowned Head, you must expect only thorns, lashes and nails;

that is, nothing but the cross; for the disciple must be treated like the master and the members like the head. And if you were to be offered, as was St. Catherine of Sienna, a crown of thorns and one of roses, you should, like her, choose the crown of thorns without

hesitation and press it upon your head, so as to be like Christ.

You know that you are living temples of the Holy Spirit and that, like living stones, you are to be set by the God of love into the building of the heavenly Jerusalem. And so you must expect to be shaped, cut and chiselled under the hammer of the cross; otherwise, you would remain rough stones, good for nothing but to be cast aside. Be careful that you do not cause the hammer to recoil when it strikes you; respect the chisel that is carving you and the hand that is shaping you. It may be that this skilful and loving craftsman wants you

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to have an important place in his eternal edifice, or to be one of the most beautiful works of art in his heavenly kingdom. So let him do what he pleases; he loves you, he knows what he is doing, he has had experience. His strokes are skilful and directed by love; not one will miscarry unless your impatience makes it do so.

The Holy Spirit compares the cross sometimes to a winnowing-fan which separates the grain from the chaff and the dust. Like the grain before the fan, let yourselves be shaken up and tossed about without resisting; for the Father of the household is winnowing you and will soon put you in his granary. At other times the Holy Spirit compares the cross to a fire which removes the rust from the iron by the intensity of its heat. Our God is a consuming fire dwelling in

our souls through his cross in order to purify them without consuming them, as he did of old in the burning bush.

Again, he likens the cross to the crucible of a forge in which the good metal is refined and the dross vanishes in smoke; the metal is purified by fire, while the impurities disappear in the heat of the flames. And it is in the crucible of tribulation and temptation that the true friends of the cross are purified by their constancy in sufferings, while its enemies are swept away through their impatience and murmuring.

My dear Friends of the Cross, see before you a great cloud of witnesses who, without saying a word, prove what I have been saying. Consider, for example, that upright man Abel, who was killed by his brother; and

Abraham, an upright man who was a stranger on earth; Lot, an upright man driven from his own country; Jacob, an upright man persecuted by his brother; Tobit, an upright man stricken with blindness; Job, an upright man who was impoverished, humbled, and covered with sores from head to foot.

Consider the countless apostles and martyrs who were bathed in their own blood; the virgins and confessors who were reduced to poverty, humbled, persecuted or exiled. They can all say with St. Paul, "*Look upon Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,*" the faith we have in him and in his Cross; it was necessary that he should suffer and so enter through the Cross into his glory.

At the side of Jesus, see Mary his Mother, who was never stained with any sin, original or actual, yet whose pure and loving heart was pierced through. If I had time to dwell on the sufferings of Jesus and Mary, I could show that what we suffer is nothing compared to theirs.

Who, then, would dare claim to be exempt from the cross? Which of us would not hasten to the place where he knows the cross awaits him? Who would refuse to say with St. Ignatius of Antioch, "Come, fire and gibbet, wild beast and all the torments of hell, that I may delight in the possession of Christ."

But if you are not willing to suffer patiently and carry your cross with resignation like God's chosen ones,

then you will have to carry it, grumbling and complaining like those on the road to damnation. You will be like the two oxen that drew the Ark of the Covenant, lowing as they went; like Simon of Cyrene who unwillingly took up the very cross of Christ and did nothing

but complain while he carried it. And in the end you will be like the impenitent thief, who from the summit of his cross plunged into the abyss.

No, this accursed earth on which we live is not destined to make us happy; in this land of darkness we cannot expect to see clearly; there is no perfect calm on this stormy sea; we can never avoid conflicts on this field of trial and battle; we cannot escape being scratched on this thorn-covered earth. Willingly or unwillingly, all must carry their cross, both those who serve God and those who do not. Keep in mind the words of the hymn: "*Three crosses stand on Calvary's height / One must be chosen, so choose aright / You must suffer like a saint or repentant thief / Or like a reprobate, in endless grief*". That is to say, if you are not willing to suffer gladly like Jesus, or patiently like the penitent thief, then you will have to suffer like the unrepentant thief. You will have to drink the cup of bitterness

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to the dregs without the consoling help of grace, and you will have to bear the whole weight of your cross, deprived of the powerful support of Christ. You will even have to carry the deadly weight which the devil will add to it by means of the impatience it will cause you. And after sharing the unhappiness of the impenitent thief on earth, you will share his misery in eternity.

*Nothing is so useful and so agreeable*

But if, on the contrary, you suffer in the right way, the cross will become a yoke that is easy and light, since Christ himself will carry it with you. It will give you wings, as it were, to lift you to heaven; it will become your ship's mast, bringing you smoothly and easily to the harbour of salvation.

Carry your cross patiently, and it will be a light in your spiritual darkness, for the one who has never suffered trials is ignorant.

Carry your cross cheerfully, and you will be filled with divine love; for only in suffering can we dwell in the pure love of Christ.

Roses are only found among thorns. It is the cross alone which nourishes our love of God, as wood is the fuel which feeds the fire. Remember the beautiful saying in the "Imitation of Christ", "In proportion as you do violence to yourself, by suffering patiently, so will you make progress" in divine love.

Do not expect anything from those sensitive and slothful people who reject the cross when it approaches them, and who are careful not to seek out crosses. What are they but an untilled soil which will produce nothing but thorns because it has not been dug up, harrowed and turned over by an experienced farmer? They are like stagnant water, which is unfit for either washing or drinking.

Carry your cross cheerfully and you will draw from it an all-powerful strength which none of your enemies



will be able to resist, and you will find in it a delight beyond anything you have known. Indeed, brethren, the true earthly paradise is found in suffering for Christ.

Ask any of the saints, and they will tell you they have never tasted a banquet more delicious for the spirit than when undergoing the severest torments. "Let all the torments of the devil come upon me," said St. Ignatius the Martyr. "Let me suffer or die," said St. Teresa of Avila. "Not death but suffering," said St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi. "May I suffer and be despised for your sake," said Blessed John of the Cross. And many others have spoken in the same terms, as we read in their lives.

My dear brothers and sisters, have faith in the word of God, for the Holy Spirit tells us that when we suffer cheerfully for God, the cross is the source of every kind of joy for all kinds of people. The joy that comes from the cross is greater than that of a poor man who suddenly comes into a fortune, or of a peasant who is raised to the throne; greater than the joy of a trader who becomes a millionaire; than of a military leader over the victories he has won; than of prisoners released from their chains. In short, imagine the greatest joy that can be experienced on earth, and then realise that the happiness of the one who bears his sufferings in the

right way contains, and even surpasses, all of them.

*Nothing is so glorious*

So rejoice and be glad when God favours you with one of his choicest crosses; for without realising it, you are blessed with the greatest gift of heaven, the greatest gift of God. If you really appreciated it, you would have Masses offered, you would make novenas at the shrines of the saints, you would undertake long pilgrimages, as did the saints, to obtain from heaven this divine gift.

The world calls this madness, degradation, stupidity, a lack of judgement and of common sense. They are blind: let them say what they like. This blindness, which makes them view

the cross in a human and distorted way, is a source of glory to us. Every time they cause us to suffer by their ridicule and insults, they are presenting us with jewels, setting us on a throne, and crowning us with laurels.

More than that as St. John Chrysostom says, "All the wealth and honours and sceptres and jewelled crowns of kings and emperors are not to be compared with the splendour of the cross." It is greater even than the glory of an apostle or evangelist. "If I had the choice," continues this holy man, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, "I would willingly leave

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heaven in order to suffer for the God of heaven. I would prefer dungeons and prisons to the thrones of the highest heaven, and the heaviest of crosses to the glory of the seraphim. I value the honour of suffering more than the gift of miracles, giving me the power to command evil spirits, shake the elements of the world, halt the sun in its course, or raise the dead to life. St. Peter and St. Paul are more glorious in their prison chains than in being caught up into the third heaven or receiving the keys of heaven.”

Indeed, is it not the Cross which has given to Jesus Christ *“the name which is above all other names, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld should bend the knee at the name of Jesus.”*

The glory of one who knows how to suffer is so great that heaven, angels and men, and even God himself, gaze on him with joy as a most glorious sight. And if the saints in heaven desired anything, it would be to return to earth so as to bear some crosses.

But if this glory is so great even on earth, what will it be in heaven? Who could describe it? Who could ever understand fully that eternal weight of glory which a single moment spent in cheerfully carrying a cross obtains for us? Who could understand the glory gained in heaven by a year, and sometimes a whole lifetime, of crosses and suffering?

You can be sure, my dear Friends of the Cross, that something wonderful is awaiting you, since the Holy Spirit has united you so intimately to that which

everyone so carefully avoids. And you can be sure, too, that God will make of you as many saints as there are Friends of the Cross if you are faithful to your vocation and willingly carry your cross as Christ did.

#### 4. Acting:

*“Let him follow me”*

41. But to suffer is not enough; the evil one and the world have their martyrs. We must suffer and carry our cross in the footsteps of Christ: “Let him follow me,” that is to say, we must suffer the way Jesus did.

*Four considerations for suffering well*

To help you to suffer in the right spirit, acquire the good habit of reflecting on these four points:

#### 1) The Eye of God

Firstly, the eye of God, who, like a great king from the height of a tower, observes with satisfaction his soldier in the midst of battle, and praises his courage. What is it that attracts God’s attention on earth? Is it kings and emperors on their thrones? He often regards them only with contempt. Is it great victories of armies, precious stones, or whatever is great in the eyes of men? No, “what is thought highly of by men is loathsome in the sight of God.” What, then, does he look upon with pleasure and satisfaction, and about which he inquires of the angels and even the devils? It is the one who is



struggling with the world, the devil, and himself for the love of God, the one who carries his cross cheerfully. As the Lord said to Satan, “Did you not see on earth a great wonder, at which all heaven is filled with admiration? Have you seen my servant Job, who is suffering for my sake?”

## 2) The Hand of God

Secondly, consider the hand of God. All natural evils which befall us, from the smallest to the greatest, come from the hand of God. The same hand that killed an army of a hundred thousand men on the spot also causes a leaf to fall from the tree and a hair from your head; the hand which pressed so heavily on Job gently touches you with a light tribulation. It is the same hand which makes both day and night, sunshine and darkness, good



and evil. He has permitted the sinful actions which hurt you; he is not the cause of their malice, but he permits the actions.

If anyone, then, treats you as Shimei treated King David, heaping you with insults and throwing stones at you, say to yourself, “We must not take revenge. Let him carry on, for the Lord has commanded him to act in this way. I know I deserve every kind of insult, and that it is only right that God should punish me. My hands, keep yourselves from violence; refrain, my tongue, from speaking; do not strike, do not say a word. It is true this man attacks me, that woman reviles me, but they are God’s representatives, who have come on behalf of his mercy to punish me as his love alone knows how. Let us not offend his justice by usurping his rights to vengeance. Let us not slight his mercy by resisting the loving strokes of his lash, lest he should deliver me, instead, to the absolute justice of eternity.”

On the one hand, God in his infinite power and wisdom bears you up, while with the other he afflicts you. With one hand he deals out death, while with the other he dispenses life. He humbles you to the dust and raises you up, and with both arms he reaches from one end of your life to the other with kindness and power; with kindness, by not allowing you to be tempted and afflicted beyond your strength; with power, by supporting you with his grace in proportion to the violence and duration of the temptation or affliction; with power again, by coming himself, as he tells us through

his holy Church, “to support you on the edge of the precipice, to guide you on the uncertain road, to shade you in the scorching heat, to protect you in the drenching rain and biting cold, to carry you in your weariness, to aid you in your difficulties, to steady you on slippery paths, to be your refuge in the midst of storms” (Prayer for a Journey).

### 3) The Wounds and Sufferings of Christ Crucified

Thirdly, reflect on the wounds and sufferings of Christ crucified. He himself has told us, “*All you who pass by the way*” of thorns and the cross, “*look and see.*” Look with the eyes of your body, and see through the eyes of your contemplation, whether your poverty, destitution, disgrace, sorrow, desolation are like mine; look upon me who am innocent, and lament, you who are guilty! The Holy Spirit tells us, through the Apostles, to contemplate the crucified Christ. He bids us arm ourselves with this thought, for it is the most powerful and formidable weapon against our enemies. When you are assailed by poverty, disrepute, sorrow, temptation, and other crosses, arm yourselves with the shield, breastplate, helmet and two-edged sword, which is the remembrance of Christ crucified. It is there you will find the solution of every problem and the means to conquer all your enemies.

### 4) Heaven Above; Hell Below

Fourthly, look upwards and see the beautiful crown that awaits you in heaven if you carry your cross well. It was this reward which sustained the patriarchs and prophets in their faith and persecutions; which inspired the apostles and martyrs in their labours and torments. The patriarchs could say with Moses, “We would rather be afflicted with the people of God, and be happy with him forever, than enjoy for a time the pleasures of sin.” And the prophets could say with David, “We suffer persecution for the reward.” The apostles and martyrs could say with St. Paul, “*We are as men sentenced to death, put on show in front of the whole universe, angels as well as men, by our suffering, and as the offal of the world, the scum of the earth, for the sake of a weight of eternal glory, which this small and temporary suffering will produce in us.*”

When you are  
assailed by crosses,  
arm yourselves with  
the remembrance of  
Christ crucified

Let us look upwards and see the angels, who exclaim, “Be careful not to forfeit the crown which is marked out for the

cross you have received, if you bear it well. If you do not bear it well, another will carry it in the right spirit and will take your crown with it. Fight bravely and suffer patiently, we are told by all the saints, and you will receive an eternal kingdom.” Finally, listen to our Lord himself, who says to you, “I will give my reward only to



the one who suffers and is victorious through his patience.”

Now let us look downward to the place we have deserved and which awaits us in hell in the company of the bad thief and all who have not repented, if we suffer as they did, with feelings of resentment, ill-will and revengefulness. Let us say with St. Augustine, “Lord, treat me as you will in this world for my sins, so long as you pardon them in eternity.”

### **Lastly, Accept the Cross Only With Gratitude**

Whenever you receive any cross, always welcome it with humility and gratitude. And when God favours you with a cross of some importance, show your gratitude in a special way, and get others to thank him for

you. Follow the example of the poor woman who lost all that she had in an unjust law- suit and immediately offered her few remaining coins to have a Mass said in thanksgiving for her good fortune.

If you are truly Friends of the Cross, then, without your knowing it, love, which is ever ingenious, will discover thousands of little crosses to enrich you. And you will not need to have any fear of vainglory, which so often spoils the patience which people exhibit under spectacular crosses. And because you have been faithful in little things, the Lord will place you in charge of greater, according to his promise. That is to say, in charge of the greater graces he will bestow on you, of the greater crosses he will send you, of the greater glory he will prepare for you...



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