



MAKE THIS YOUR BEST LENT EVER!

TRIBULATIONS HELP!

In the first place, tribulation opens the eyes which prosperity had kept shut. St. Paul remained blind after Jesus Christ appeared to him, and, during his blindness, he perceived the errors in which he lived. The Prodigal Son, when he found himself under the necessity of feeding swine, and afflicted with hunger, exclaimed: *“I will arise and go to my father”* (Luke 15:18).

Secondly, tribulation takes from our hearts all affections to earthly things. God, to detach us from temporal goods, mingles them with bitterness, so that we may conceive a dislike for them, and place our affections on the things of Heaven.

Thirdly, they who live in prosperity are molested by many temptations of pride, of vain-glory; of desires of acquiring greater wealth, great honors, and greater pleasures. Tribulations free us from these temptations, and make us humble.

Fourthly, by tribulation we atone for the sins we have committed much better than by voluntary works of penance.

Fifthly, tribulations convince us that God alone is able and willing to relieve us in our miseries, tribulations remind us of Him, and compel us to have recourse to His mercy.

Sixthly, tribulations enable us to acquire great merits before God, by giving us opportunities of exercising the virtues of humility, of patience, and of resignation to the divine will.

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ARE YOU FEELING MORTIFIED?

“Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself”—Matthew 16:24

St. Vincent de Paul tells us that *“The first step to be taken by one who wishes to follow Christ is, according to Our Lord’s Own words, that of renouncing himself—that is, his own senses, his own passions, his own will, his own judgment, and all the movements of nature, making to God a sacrifice of all these things, and of all their acts, which are surely sacrifices very acceptable to the Lord. And we must never grow weary of this; for if anyone having, so to speak, one foot already in Heaven, should abandon this exercise, when the time should come for him to put the other there, he would run much risk of being lost”* (St. Vincent de Paul).

The same Saint made himself such a proficient in this virtue that it might be called the weapon most frequently and constantly handled by him through his whole life until his last breath; and by this he succeeded in gaining absolute dominion over all the movements of his inferior nature. Therefore, he kept his own passions so completely subject to reason, that he could scarcely be known to have any.

St. John Climacus says that the ancient Fathers, even those who were most perfect, exercised themselves in many kinds of mortification and contempt. For they said that if they should give up training themselves because men thought them already consummate in virtue, they would come, in time, to abandon and lose that modesty and patience which they possessed; just as a field, though rich and fertile, if it be no longer cultivated, becomes unsightly and ends in producing only thorns and thistles.

“The measure of our advancement in the spiritual life should be taken from the progress we make in the virtue of mortification; for it should be held as certain that the greater violence we shall do ourselves in mortification, the greater advance we shall make in perfection” (St. Jerome).

When St. Francis Borgia heard it said that anyone was a Saint, he used to answer, *“He is, if he is mortified.”* In this way he himself became so great a Saint; for he exercised himself in mortification to such a degree that only that day seemed to him truly wretched in which he had not undergone some mortification, either bodily or spiritually.

When a young monk once asked an aged Saint why, among so many who aim at perfection, so few are found perfect, he replied, *“Because in order to be perfect it is necessary to die wholly to one’s own inclinations, and there are few who arrive at this.”*

LIVING IN HOPE

Hope here is to be thought of not only as looking forward to Heaven, which will be granted us if we do our part in this life, but, more especially, as having confidence in the power of God to straighten out our muddled lives, even now while we are still living.

The first meaning, of this theological virtue, is certainly pointed toward the everlasting happiness that will fulfill the promises of Christ, but there is a nearer meaning of it, that looks to God's Providence from day to day. It is this second sort of Hope that sanctity develops and brings to perfection.

For instance, the clause *"Thy kingdom come,"* in the Our Father, expresses the long-distance Hope, whereas the clause *"Give us this day our daily bread"* expresses the local or immediate Hope.

Sanctity touches both, but one of its more immediate effects is to enlarge the virtue of trust: the conviction that God is giving us our daily bread, and will go on doing so.

It is a side of Hope that is very close to Faith, and, for this reason, it makes the same demands upon us as Faith does: perseverance and prayer and the single eye that looks below the surface for the things of God and refuses the worldly view.

If *"the just man lives by Faith"* (Habacuc 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11), and if Charity is both the *"bond"* (Colossians 3:14) of the just man's perfection and the *"urge"* (2 Corinthians 5:14) that sets him to work upon his perfection, then Hope is his greatest support. Most of our difficulties and failures come because we too easily lose heart.

Now, Hope starts off by knowing that life is going to be difficult. It admits that, without grace, perfection is miles out of reach. It faces the idea of failure. It sees how there are bound to be disappointments and temptations all along the line. But it just goes right on trusting.

A person who is strong in this kind of Hope, looks upon everything that comes along — even mistakes and serious failures — as being a chance not to be missed.

Instead of sinking into a mood of despair and self-pity, such a person says simply, *"This has turned out wrong, and everything is in a mess, and I have no idea how it is going to be put right, but I can still count absolutely on the Providence of God."*

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"It should be our principal business to conquer ourselves, and, from day to day, to go on increasing in strength and perfection. Above all, however, it is necessary for us to strive to conquer our little temptations, such as fits of anger, suspicions, jealousies, envy, deceitfulness, vanity, attachments, and evil thoughts. For in this way we shall acquire strength to subdue greater ones" (St. Francis de Sales).

A certain physiognomist, looking at Socrates, pronounced him to be inclined to dishonesty, gluttony, drunkenness, and many other vices. His disciples, being angry at this, wished to lay violent hands on the man. But Socrates said: *"Be calm, for he has told the truth. I should have been just such a man as he describes, if I had not given myself to mortification."*

When an old monk was asked how he could bear the noise of some shepherd boys near him, he answered: *"I was at first inclined to say something to them; but I thought better of it, and said to myself, 'If I cannot endure so little as this, how shall I endure greater trials, when they come to me?'"*

St. Francis Xavier acted in the same way on occasion, and said that we must not deceive ourselves; for whoever does not conquer himself in trifles, will not be able to do so in greater matters.

"Whoever makes little account of exterior mortifications, alleging that the interior are more perfect, shows clearly that he is not mortified at all, either exteriorly or interiorly" (St. Vincent de Paul).

This Saint was always an enemy to his body, treating it with much austerity—chastising it with hair-cloth, iron chains, and leather belts armed with sharp points. Every morning on rising, he took a severe discipline—a practice which he had begun before founding the Congregation, and which he never omitted on account of the hardships of journeys, or in his convalescence from any illness; but, on the contrary, he took additional ones on special occasions. All his life he slept upon a simple straw bed, and always rose at the usual hour for the Community, though he was generally the last of all to retire to rest, and though he often could not sleep more than two hours out of the night, on account of his infirmities. From this it frequently happened that he was much tormented during the day by drowsiness, which he would drive away by remaining on his feet, or in some uncomfortable posture, or by inflicting on himself some annoyance. Besides, he willingly bore great cold in winter, and great heat in summer, with other inconveniences; in a word, he embraced, or rather sought, all the sufferings he could, and was very careful never to allow any opportunity for mortifying himself to escape.

Yet all of this is useless unless it is joined to the love of God, as St. Paul points out: *"If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal! And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing! And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing!"* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

If all of that sounds too tough for you, then practice mortification through praying many Rosaries. St. Louis de Montfort says that *"St. Augustine assures us that there is no spiritual exercise more fruitful or more useful than the frequent reflection on the sufferings of Our Lord. St. Albert the Great, who had St. Thomas Aquinas as his student, learned in a revelation that by simply thinking of or meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ, a Christian gains more merit than if he had fasted on bread and water every Friday for a year, or had beaten himself with the discipline once a week till blood flowed, or had recited the whole Book of Psalms every day. If this is so, then how great is the merit that we can gain from the Rosary, in which we meditate on the Passion of Our Lord?"* (St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*, "Twenty-Eighth Rose").

IMITATION OF CHIRST

Vain Desires, False Hopes

When a man desires a thing too much, he at once becomes ill at ease. A proud and avaricious man never rests, whereas he who is poor and humble of heart lives in a world of peace.

An unmortified man is quickly tempted and overcome in small, trifling evils; his spirit is weak, in a measure carnal and inclined to sensual things; he can hardly abstain from earthly desires. Hence it makes him sad to forego them; he is quick to anger if reproved.

Yet if he satisfies his desires, remorse of conscience overwhelms him because he followed his passions and they did not lead to the peace he sought.

True peace of heart, then, is found in resisting passions, not in satisfying them. There is no peace in the carnal man, in the man given to vain attractions, but there is peace in the fervent and spiritual man.

Vain is the man who puts his trust in men, in created things.

Do not be ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ and to seem poor in this world. Do not be self-sufficient, but place your trust in God. Do what lies in your power and God will aid your good will. Put no trust in your own learning, nor in the cunning of any man, but rather in the grace of God, Who helps the humble and humbles the proud.

If you have wealth, do not glory in it, nor in friends because they are powerful, but in God, Who gives all things and Who desires above all to give Himself. Do not boast of personal stature or of physical beauty, qualities which are marred and destroyed by a little sickness. Do not take pride in your talent or ability, lest you displease God to Whom belongs all the natural gifts that you have.

Do not think yourself better than others lest, perhaps, you be accounted worse before God Who knows what is in man. Do not take pride in your good deeds, for God's judgments differ from those of men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you, see more good in others, so that you may remain humble.

It does no harm to esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one. The humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger.

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THE PROOF OF ONE WHO LOVES

Taken from *The Imitation of Christ*, Book Three : Chapter Five

THE WONDERFUL EFFECT OF DIVINE LOVE

THE DISCIPLE

I bless You, O heavenly Father, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, for having condescended to remember me, a poor creature. Thanks to You, O Father of mercies, God of all consolation, Who with Your comfort sometimes refresh me, who am not worthy of it. I bless You always and glorify You with Your only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, forever and ever.

Ah, Lord God, my holy Lover, when You come into my heart, all that is within me will rejoice. You are my glory and the exultation of my heart. You are my hope and refuge in the day of my tribulation. But because my love is as yet weak and my virtue imperfect, I must be strengthened and comforted by You. Visit me often, therefore, and teach me Your holy discipline. Free me from evil passions and cleanse my heart of all disorderly affection so that, healed and purified within, I may be fit to love, strong to suffer, and firm to persevere.

Love is an excellent thing, a very great blessing, indeed. It makes every difficulty easy, and bears all wrongs with equanimity. For it bears a burden without being weighted and renders sweet all that is bitter. The noble love of Jesus spurs to great deeds and excites longing for that which is more perfect. Love tends upward; it will not be held down by anything low. Love wishes to be free and estranged from all worldly affections, lest its inward sight be obstructed, lest it be entangled in any temporal interest and overcome by adversity.

Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger or higher or wider; nothing is more pleasant, nothing fuller, and nothing better in Heaven or on earth, for love is born of God and cannot rest except in God, Who is above all created things. One who is in love flies, runs, and rejoices; he is free, not bound. He gives all for all and possesses all in all, because he rests in the one sovereign Good, Who is above all things, and from Whom every good flows and proceeds. He does not look to the gift but turns himself above all gifts to the Giver.

Love often knows no limits but overflows all bounds. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of troubles, attempts more than it is able, and does not plead impossibility, because it believes that it may and can do all things. For this reason, it is able to do all, performing and effecting much where he who does not love fails and falls. Love is watchful. Sleeping, it does not slumber. Wearied, it is not tired. Pressed, it is not straitened. Alarmed, it is not confused, but like a living flame, a burning torch, it forces its way upward and passes unharmed through every obstacle. If a man loves, he will know the sound of this voice. For this warm affection of soul is a loud voice crying in the ears of God, and it says:

"My God, my love, You are all mine and I am all Yours. Give me an increase of love, that I may learn to taste with the inward lips of my heart how sweet it is to love, how sweet to be dissolved in love and bathe in it. Let me be rapt in love. Let me rise above self in great fervor and wonder. Let me sing the hymn of love, and let me follow You, my Love, to the heights. Let my soul exhaust itself in praising You, rejoicing out of love. Let me love You more than myself, and let me not love myself except for Your sake. In You let me love all those who truly love You, as the law of love, which shines forth from You, commands."

PRAYER MISFIRING?

St. Louis Marie de Montfort writes:

Take great care to avoid the two pitfalls that most people fall into during the Rosary. The first is the danger of not asking for any graces at all, so that if some good people were asked their Rosary intention they would not know what to say. So, whenever you say your Rosary, be sure to ask for some special grace or virtue, or strength to overcome some sin.

The second fault commonly committed in saying the Rosary is to have no intention other than that of getting it over with as quickly as possible. This is because so many look upon the Rosary as a burden, which weighs heavily upon them when it has not been said, especially when we have promised to say it regularly or have been told to say it as a penance more or less against our will.

It is sad to see how most people say the Rosary. They say it astonishingly fast, slipping over part of the words. We could not possibly expect anyone, even the most important person, to think that a slipshod address of this kind was a compliment, and yet we imagine that Jesus and Mary will be honored by it!

Small wonder, then, that the most sacred prayers of our holy religion seem to bear no fruit, and that, after saying thousands of Rosaries, we are still no better than we were before.

I beg you to restrain your natural precipitation when saying your Rosary, and make some pauses in the middle of the Our Father and Hail Mary, and a smaller one after the words of the Our Father and Hail Mary which I have marked with a cross, as follows:

Our Father Who art in Heaven, + hallowed by Thy Name, + Thy kingdom come, + Thy will be done + on Earth as it is in Heaven. + Give us this day + our daily bread, + and forgive us our trespasses + as we forgive those who trespass against us, + and lead us not into temptation, + but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, + the Lord is with thee, + blessed art thou among women, + and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. + Holy Mary, Mother of God, + pray for us sinners, now + and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*, "Forty-Fourth Rose").

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Love is swift, sincere, kind, pleasant, and delightful. Love is strong, patient and faithful, prudent, long-suffering, and manly. Love is never self-seeking, for in whatever a person seeks himself there he falls from love.

Love is circumspect, humble, and upright. It is neither soft nor light, nor intent upon vain things. It is sober and chaste, firm and quiet, guarded in all the senses. Love is subject and obedient to superiors. It is mean and contemptible in its own eyes, devoted and thankful to God; always trusting and hoping in Him even when He is distasteful to it, for there is no living in love without sorrow.

He who is not ready to suffer all things and to stand resigned to the will of the Beloved is not worthy to be called a lover. A lover must embrace willingly all that is difficult and bitter for the sake of the Beloved, and he should not turn away from Him because of adversities.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

Because, on account of a slight difficulty you give up what you have undertaken and are too eager to seek consolation. The brave lover stands firm in temptations and pays no heed to the crafty persuasions of the enemy. As I please him in prosperity, so in adversity I am not displeasing to him. The wise lover regards not so much the gift of Him Who loves as the love of Him Who gives. He regards the affection of the Giver rather than the value of the gift, and sets his Beloved above all gifts.

All is not lost, then, if you sometimes feel less devout than you wish toward Me or My saints. That good and sweet feeling which you sometimes have is the effect of present grace and a certain foretaste of your heavenly home. You must not lean upon it too much, because it comes and goes. But to fight against evil thoughts which attack you is a sign of virtue and great merit. Do not, therefore, let strange fantasies disturb you, no matter what they concern. Hold strongly to your resolution and keep a right intention toward God.

It is not an illusion that you are sometimes rapt in ecstasy and then quickly returned to the usual follies of your heart. For these are evils which you suffer rather than commit; and so long as they displease you and you struggle against them, it is a matter of merit and not a loss.

The old enemy tries by all means in his power to hinder your desire for good and to turn you from every devotional practice, especially from the veneration of the saints, from devout meditation on My passion, and from your firm purpose of advancing in virtue. He suggests many evil thoughts that he may cause you weariness and horror, and thus draw you away from prayer and holy reading. A humble confession displeases him and, if he could, he would make you omit Holy Communion.

Do not believe him or heed him, even though he often sets traps to deceive you. When he suggests evil, unclean things, accuse him. Say to him: "Away, unclean spirit! Shame, miserable creature! You are but filth to bring such things to my ears. Begone, most wretched seducer! You shall have no part in me, for Jesus will be my strength, and you shall be confounded. I would rather die and suffer all torments than consent to you. Be silent! Though you bring many troubles upon me I will have none of you. The Lord is my light, my salvation. Whom shall I fear? Though armies unite against me, my heart will not fear, for the Lord is my Helper"

Fight like a good soldier and if you sometimes fall through weakness, rise again with greater strength than before, trusting in My grace. Beware of complacency and pride. Many are led into error through these faults and sometimes fall into almost perpetual blindness. Let the fall of these, who proudly presume on self, be a warning to you and an incentive to humility.