

# Life of the Spirit

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## THE CROSS AND SUFFERING

BY

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.<sup>1</sup>



IN giving us the way in which we should serve God, our blessed Lord laid down a principle that the disciple is not above the master and that presumably no one should be surprised if they found that a way of life good enough for the Son of God was good enough for them, and so he effectually put a stop to any complaint on our part. The highest way of life is the way of the Master; there is none higher. By such a standing only are we to judge our own lives. We talk of the success and of the failure of our life or of the lives of others; we are accustomed to speak of one life as happy, of another as full of tragedy.

The supreme ideal of Christian life was the Master's; would the people of his own time have said that his life was a failure or a success as they stood on Calvary? Why!—a failure, of course. Even those in sympathy lost all hope. We have women coming to anoint the dead body with no thought whatever of the risen life. The disciples on the way to Emmaus, even on the day of the resurrection, when he noticed their quite obvious depression and asked the reason, were astonished that he did not know the defeat of the Master and that a dream was over, gone! 'We had hoped', a complete failure—not only to his own disciples but to everyone it looked like the end of a great career that had promised well. They remembered his miracles absolutely. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save'. A taunt—a jeer. They knew all about it but it did not move them to any sort of sympathy; they remembered and it struck them as amusing that *himself* he could not save.

We know it wasn't a failure. He had done *all* his Father gave him to do! *Consummatum est*. But it *looked* a failure, that is the way of human life. St John the Baptist was a popular preacher and then the crowds left him. All poured out to hear him and then he died in prison, even our Lord does nothing at all to save him. The disciples of St John the Baptist were furious—'All the crowd is going to him whom you pointed out', they said to him. 'I must decrease

<sup>1</sup> From a retreat preached in Edinburgh in July, 1930.

that he may increase', he answered them. He was a perfect success. His own work was to be a failure. He came only to gather the crowd and leave it—pass them on to our Lord. He had to decrease, that was his vocation, his business. He was the precursor, the herald, and if all men treated the herald with great honour the King might be forgotten. He is meant to be a failure, it is not his doom but his glory.

'The disciple is not above the master.' You must not complain. The more desolate you are, the nearer to your Master. No disciple has any business to say, 'Look how I am treated'. If you were to go through all your own particular trouble you would find more still of the same thing in the life of the Master. We are mere followers. The cross is what he aimed at and so we should at least stifle our complaints.

We are so apt to grumble—physical pain—what is there to cry about? Why should everyone in the house know you did not sleep last night? Had he not nights of watching on the hillside—praying in the garden—torture during the passion? Surely we can bear pain if not with pleasure at least in silence. High and fantastic? Yes, but we are Christians. Is it not rather to our credit to be misunderstood; are we not then nearer to our Master? Why are we so fearfully excited about it? 'We meant so well and such misunderstandings are terrible.' 'And he was silent'; he answered them nothing. Why should he? What does it matter; why should we grumble? He was deprived of all God's sensible presence. The darkness of the earth was not so dark as that which descended on his heart. 'No one has sorrow like unto my sorrow'. No one in all the world.

Our lives have to be lived on the highest plane. It is difficult to flesh and blood courageously to cry, 'I am glad', when suffering comes. Well, we need not; we are only asked to carry our cross. We *called* ourselves his followers. He carried his cross and we, his followers, must do it after him. It is part of the game; if we don't want to play we must leave the playground; if we stay we must keep the rules and they are that we must share his suffering. He will suffer all our sufferings, carry *all* our griefs. We can carry only a certain amount; he will measure it out to us as medicine is measured to a sick child; drop by drop he pours it out. *He* knows what we can stand and he will only try us up to the edge of what we can bear—up to the hilt, yes, no further.

He knows how far he can go and he will go that far. He will treat us as himself—a cross, and in it just what suits our particular temperament, as a mother chooses a gift to suit the temperament of each of her children. The cross will be for our weak-point, where we can be touched on the raw. ~~Not what~~ he gives others, that would

be unjust. There will be nothing heroic in it; we might swagger if there were. Awful to give us something we could value, to be buoyed up by suffering. He takes care to give us humiliating things to bear—that is what really we need, something that really *does* press hard. We know—surely we know—he gives us those things specially trying to our character. He made us all and he acts as an architect building a house, wide windows, but for a hot country narrow windows to keep out the sun. God is an architect and he builds to suit each one of us individually; so our crosses are always individual. God is infinite, and so can attend to every human life. He treats us not as a mass or as cases, but as individual human beings. He knows our past and our future, he knows to what extreme limit our strength can respond. The cross is his way of life for us. He is our Master. We have chosen to be in his school, so it is foolish to cry out and complain; we have let ourselves in for it. It is a personal business, this cross-bearing. He knows the limit. On our part it is asked that we should accept it and realise that it is his will, and that settles the question. His will is the one thing in our life. He knows what he is doing, and we know that he knows. He knows, measures, chooses.

We must train ourselves to see God's will in everything, even in the weather. We are so impatient even if kept waiting, and that is God's will. 'Can't I try to make life comfortable?' Of course. But if you *can't*, take it and accept it as it is! It is God's gift to us. So God's will is to be the great subject of our prayer, our Mass, our meditation. It is the vast orchestra responding to his conducting. It is the highest sanctity not merely to accept it but joyfully to make it ours. No grumbling! The high water mark of sanctity is to suffer, not grumblingly, but with joy, as he suffered, light heartedly, though the sweat of blood was flowing to the ground, though beaten and struck, still there was real joy in his heart. He was *glad* of this chance to *show* his love and he took it.

That joyfulness may be for us a long way off, but we must hope one day to be able to bear suffering without complaining. To do this is only negative; we should strive to bear it joyously, gladly, as the Master did. The deepest teaching that he gave was that he chastises not according to sins, but according to his love of you. Comforting? Stooping to your weakness. Measure his love by his apparent unkindness. When he asks something hard of us it shows he trusts us, it is the highest expression of love. Pain *can* go hand in hand with pleasure, side by side—*should*, I suppose. A dream? Start by being silent, and *trust* whatever he gives. It is *he* who gives it and this knowledge should make us content. We should learn from him the way we should walk, and he takes care we do learn it. 'The disciple

is not above his master.' This should finish our grumbles, and we should be *glad*—at any rate accept, and one day, if we try to be faithful, he will lead us to the greatest things, and teach us to meet life not only with patience but even with joy.

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## A R U L E O F L I F E

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



HE first conversion has been accomplished and grace begins its gradual work of supernaturalizing the whole man. In this way a man begins to lead an upright life, upright because directed at last towards his true and last end; his life is now straightened out. This is what Scripture means by the word 'righteousness'. The righteous man is the upright man; he is not bent away from God. He is 'plumb'. This plumbness begins with the spiritual life of grace. But to build 'plumb', a man must have a plumb-line; he must have a measure. Rightness, rectitude, demands a rule, and the righteous man is a man who lives according to rule. St Thomas contrasts this rectitude of moral life with that of justice which deals with external goods, and he says, 'This type of rectitude which implies the order towards a fitting end and the divine law which is the rule of the human will is common to every virtue' (I-II, lv, 4 ad 4). To live uprightly is to live virtuously, according to rule, the straight rule of reason coming out from the divine Reason and the divine law. And St Thomas has another magnificent phrase on this rule of right reason. He is commenting on Psalm 4, verses 6 and 7: *Quis ostendit nobis bona? Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine*. 'It is as though the Psalmist says: the light of reason which is in us can only show us good things and regulate our will in so far as it is the light of your (God's) countenance, i.e. derived from your countenance' (I-II, xix, 4). 'The Lord hath led the just by straight paths—*per vias rectas*', says the Psalmist again. A man cannot lead an upright life unless he measure himself by the very countenance of the Almighty. An instrument is 'just' when it is accurately alined with its true measure. The just man must be alined with the mind of God. And this mind of God is interpreted to him in many ways through the human reason. So the just man lives according to rule—the one fact which the Stoics saw clearly.

The author of the *Ancren Riwe* thus sets out to interpret the divine mind for the regulation of his recluses, and so his first task is