



20 February 1881

The Agony in the Garden

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Sisters,

Today I would like you to meditate with me on Our Lord's sufferings. We ought to meditate on the Passion during Lent and indeed at all other times, for many, including St. Thomas, are of the opinion that therein lies the quickest way to perfection. Of course meditation of this kind does not exclude devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, neither does it prevent us from dwelling on any other Mystery such as that of the Holy Infancy.

Each one is free to follow her own devotion, but it is still true that during Lent all our attention should be focused on the Passion, and I think that the best way to begin is to think of Our Lord in His Agony. It would take weeks to exhaust so great a mystery, and all I propose to do is to help you with a few suggestions, and so we will begin by thinking of sin and all its ugliness.

Our Lord offered Himself in expiation for the sins of the whole world, but we will pass from sin in general to the consideration of our own personal sins seen in the setting of all the others borne by Our Lord. This we shall find easy if we realize the horror sin inspires in the All-Holy, sinless One to whom every least offence against the Father is unbearable.

We shall then with deep contrition and great love resolve to avoid even the smallest fault for the future. It would be foolish to say, "anyway my sins are not mortal sins, or at least they are not all mortal". We must acknowledge all our venial sins as well as all our bad inclinations and tendencies to vanity, jealousy, pride, disobedience and laziness, no matter what degree they may exist in us. Then we must think of Our Lord in the midst of His great sufferings; freely accepting them in order to expiate our every fault. Our minds should be filled with thoughts such as these as we contemplate Our Lord in His agony, and in them you will find the meaning and justification of all I am going to say later.

Now let us think of the condition Our Lord was in at the moment when He voluntarily accepted the terrible weight of our sins. It was the most abandoned and sorrowful condition imaginable. "*He began to be greatly distressed and troubled*"¹. He began to be afraid, and his soul was overwhelmed with fear. Holy Scripture never makes use of a word, without intending it to be understood in its fullest sense. Yes, Our Lord was filled with fear and terror.

¹ Mk.14:33

Imagine for yourselves a soul overwhelmed with sorrow. Quite rightly it has been said that no reasonable being would ever belittle physical suffering or count it as nothing, but the sufferings of the soul are far more terrible, and Our Lord desired to experience these in all their intensity. Let us contemplate Him as with soul sorrowful unto death He accepts all physical suffering. Let us contemplate Him in His fear and sadness, in His great weariness and anguish, completely dejected and broken. I will not say discouraged, for He is courage itself - but embracing all that we understand by supreme agony and anguish of soul. This is the condition to which Our Lord was reduced when He accepted the weight of sin, and it was to this condition that your sins and mine brought Him.

No true and solid piety can exist in a soul unless it hates both mortal and venial sins above every other evil and I am not alone in saying this. You will remember that when St. Catherine of Sienna asked for the greatest of graces for her confessor, she obtained for him contrition for all his sins. While he was with her he suddenly began to weep. Yes, this holy priest and religious was so penetrated with sorrow for his sins that his tears flowed abundantly and he could not cease from weeping. What greater grace could he have received! Even if you were to be raised above the ground in prayer, ecstasy and rapture, you would not be experiencing a grace any more exalted and solid and wonderful than that which consists in a deep sorrow for sin together with a firm resolution to die rather than sin again.

I expect by now you have realized more clearly all that Our Lord accepted in expiation for sin, and therefore will be able to draw your own conclusions. Our Lord's agony lasted for three hours, revealing the state of anguish and persevering prayer into which His soul was often plunged. What a great lesson for Religious! We are called to a life of prayer though not necessarily to one of consolation. It is quite likely that we shall find ourselves with no light at all, filled with sorrow for sin and in a state of continual desolation, but surrendering our will to His will we shall say the same prayer over and over again just as He did in the garden. He had been abandoned by His followers and they had fallen asleep. He remained alone with the Tempter, alone with the crimes of the world, alone before His Father who saw only the world's sin which His Son had taken upon Himself, and Our Lord accepts everything, surrenders Himself and prays.

Sometimes a Religious passes through just such an anguish of soul. There is nothing for her to do but to unite herself to Our Lord, to suffer and pray with Him. The agony is not the final immolation of the Cross, but it is the passion of the soul and of the heart, and also of the conscience. Our Lord as man possessed a conscience, and it was an extremely delicate one, so pure and far away from all evil, and perfectly submissive to His Father's Will. What a passion of suffering it must have experienced when it was loaded with the indignities of the entire world!

Now that we have contemplated Our Lord in His state of sorrow and suffering, it will seem but little to us if we are asked to pass a week or two in keeping Him company in the anguish and sorrow He so willingly embraced for love of us. Our Lord said to His disciples: "*Could you not watch one hour with me?*"² He says the same thing to us: "Will you not be with me in my agony, praying with me in suffering and patience, repeating the same prayer with me over and over again?" And what a prayer, Sisters! A prayer of perfect submission to the Will of the Father.

² Mt.26:40

Our Lord did not impose the sufferings he endured on himself; He did not choose them. It is in absolute submission, in complete union of his will with the will of his father, that He accepted the sufferings presented to him with such generosity. In the last part of this meditation let us contemplate the perfect generosity of our Saviour as He accepts all the pain, all His pitiful condition and anguish, the desertion of His disciples and the suffering and abandonment of Cross. At the same time He foresees all the future sufferings the Church and all the souls who having been called to Him will afterwards prove unfaithful.

Somewhere it is said: *“I have been wounded in the house of those who loved me”*³. Sisters, these words are meant for us, and the wounds are the faults and infidelities found in God’s House. He sees all the betrayals - Judas was only one example. But how many souls there are who embrace Our Lord and afterwards betray Him! Indeed all who return to the world after having made their Vows in Religion are images of the kiss of Judas, and I am sure that you will agree with me in thinking that when mortal sin enters a soul consecrated to God, that also is like the betrayal of Judas. Who knows whether in giving way to venial sin, to anger, resentment or uncharitableness, a Religious may not at one moment or another fail into grave sin. Here is indeed another motive for avoiding every occasion of sin.

Our Lord then wills and accepts everything. Let us contemplate His generosity as He foresees His Passion in its every detail. He knows what terrible sufferings are awaiting Him, and He sees His Father’s face turned from Him, but nevertheless He accepts and will it all. There will be no consolation, only abandonment right to the end, and yet Our Lord freely and completely surrenders Himself to obedience and sacrifice.

If you meditate lovingly and at length on Our Lord’s agony you will be able to enter into the Passion through His Sacred Heart and His own dispositions. Thus you will attain to a perfect and unwavering obedience that is opposed to all sin and which will lead you to love all that the Rule and the Religious Life demand of you. Your sacrifices may be great but they will never equal those of Our Lord, no matter whether they come from Divine Providence, from illness or by way of your Superiors. They will never be comparable to His sufferings, but the important thing is to be sure that your interior dispositions resemble His as closely as possible.

By now you will have seen more clearly why meditation on the Passion is the greatest meditations for is you establish yourself in dispositions similar to those of Our Lord then nothing will impede you, and you will always prove yourselves His faithful spouses. You must surrender yourselves to Him in suffering, persevere in prayer in spite of aridity, and abandon yourself entirely to His Will when in anguish or pain.

Would anyone in the world look only for pleasure and enjoyment knowing all the time that the one she loved was enduring suffering and humiliation? We are in this position Sisters, as regards Our Lord. We belong to Him for we have been chosen by Him and since He has made us His it is only right that we should share His sufferings and humiliations. May we learn to do this at His feet by means of prayer.



³ Zech.13:6

