



On TRUE CONSOLATION

30 January 1876

Today, I want to tell you something about consolation in prayer. I talked to you about it some time ago, from the point of view of sensible consolations which tell nothing about the soul's progress in prayer or something to which we should be attached. There is, however, a consolation that comes from God which is precious and that is what I want to speak about today.

You know that God is a pure spirit not available to our senses. The soul is also a spirit, but not pure spirit. It is a spirit created by God to inhabit our body, animate it and be so intimately united to it that it is only one and the same substance. This spirit receives all natural impressions through the organs of the body. It enlivens the marvelous work that God has produced and lives in such close union with it that the spirit governs it, continually receives its influence.

Thus, we have also the counterpart in our soul of all that is inferior and sensible. Our imagination, our health, our sensitivity, impressions that we receive from the exterior—everything affects the soul.

From these external influences arise consolations and desolations that are deep and acute feelings. This having been said, it is certain nonetheless which a spirit is made in God's image, has also a purely spiritual faculty, capable of receiving things that are of a purely spiritual nature as with the intelligence. But the union of body and soul is so intimate that our soul or our intelligence is raised to the heights of knowledge (knowing) only when it is upheld and aided by the senses and sensible impressions that come to it from the exterior. Faith only comes to the soul through hearing: *Fides ex auditu*. The sacraments bring us grace but under material signs which are experienced by the body first. Nonetheless, there is a fine point of the soul where the intelligence and the will can withdraw and escape the action of the senses and find themselves alone under the action of the Spirit of God, as it were; and because all is spiritual, he wants to and can give himself if we are prepared by recollection, renunciation and purity of heart. God's goodness is so great that often he reveals this spiritual dwelling to beginners, inviting them to become recollected and seek God within, leaving the life of the senses.

St Ignatius has admirable annotations concerning what this infinitely good Spirit of God produces deep within souls. "The Creator alone, he says, can fully penetrate his creature, raise it, and change it, set it aflame with his love." When, without any provocation from the exterior, consolation is present within the soul, when the soul feels raised to God, enlightened, expanded, filled with joy, generosity, faith, purity—when the consolation comes from within, we can hope that it is the Author of every good who distributes his gifts and that the consolation comes from God.

This is true consolation; it is less sensible but more powerful. It has a strength which upholds the soul. I think God supported the martyrs in the midst of the most atrocious suffering with this true light. Everything outside presented the soul with desolation and pain.

They were in jails, in the hands of evil people. Their families were desolate; their relatives begged them to give in. The tortured one was a father or mother or child: all that was according to nature tortured their hearts. They had before them the cruelest torments, derision, death. And in face of their death which came so terribly slowly, they enjoyed strength, consolation, interior light which you find in almost all the *Acts of the Martyrs*. Aflame with fire, St Lawrence said: *There is nothing dark in my death, everything is brilliant light. My soul clings to you, while my flesh burns for you.* God poured joy, light and consolation into the souls of these courageous people.

There is a prayer-life, a life faithful to God which leads the soul to receive the same lights. Detached from the life of the senses by mortification, habitually united to God by love, such a person enters into the sanctuary where God is found.

It is a summit which Francis de Sales calls the "fine point of the soul." The devil cannot enter to touch it. For faithful and humble souls, it is a place of refuge where, despite all the temptations, they can persevere in adoration and in conformity with all that God wills.

Then, the light which will be our joy in eternity, that light which is a beam from the face of God and which will one day, we hope, be our glory and our beatitude, that light begins to shine often within our souls. It resembles the morning light, the first rays of dawn, when all is still in night. The valleys remain in darkness but already the rising dawn gilds the mountain peaks, the "peaks [fine point]" of the steeples and belfries. So, in our souls, the light rises on the heights, the most intimate point, and makes joy and happiness reign. If you understand that, you can understand how Our Lord could promise the hundredfold even in the midst of persecutions. Whatever may happen in this world, even in crushing pain and suffering, the light that resides in the "fine point" of the soul is the hundredfold because it is the beginning of eternal joy and glory. God is the unique beatitude of the soul in this world as in the next. You ought to believe this, my Sisters, and understand that, created for God; we can never find any true joy far from God.

When you have lived a long time, known many people and see all sorts of situations, this is no longer a truth proposed to our faith but a truth that is felt, experienced, tasted.

When you are young and you see people happy according to the world's standards, it may seem that they possess real beatitude and they enjoy external things. They seem to have no cares, only happiness. They are loved and everything around them seems to contribute to their happiness. At sixty, and sometimes before that, sometimes later, you see that this happiness is not solidly founded nor true and that God alone gives true, deep and lasting happiness. St Jeanne de Chantal says, and I say the same with the certitude experience gives, that only those who have let the light of God, the life of God, govern their wills completely and have made God reign in the most intimate and reserved part of themselves, are truly happy.

When a person lets the reign of God thus come into the most intimate depths of her being, God, his love and will, become a beatitude that she keeps even in extreme pain. The greatest example of this deep happiness united to immense sorrow is, after Our Lord during the Passion, in the Blessed Virgin Mary. The saints do not hesitate to say that, at the foot of the Cross, in that pain, that no other pain equaled, God was happiness, a source of joy in obedience sacrifice and love, in the depths of the Blessed Virgin. Her entire being was handed over to torture; she suffered in every fiber of her heart and soul, in all her feelings, in

her entire body. But her being was also united to God, abandoned to God; and this perfect union was bliss, hidden, albeit, in the fine point of the soul while she was in extreme sorrow.

This, my Sisters, is true consolation. It is in staying faithful to God that we obtain that unshakeable communion; and one can experience that word of St. Paul “Who can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ?” (*Romans 8: 35-39*) May God give all of you this sovereignly desirable consolation for it comes from God and is a foretaste of a blessed eternity.
