

## XIII.

## The Man of Sorrows and Men of Sorrow.

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THE Christian under affliction is especially called to meditate upon the place that afflictions occupy in the plan of Divine redemption, in the development of the reign of God upon the earth, and in the revelations of the Holy Scriptures. It is then that he understands the meaning of that passage so simple and so profound, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." But it would be extraordinary if we could be ripened for eternal life, and more particularly if a servant of God should see his labours blessed, I do not say without afflictions, but without a large measure of affliction. "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." This doctrine is clearly revealed in Him whose sacrifice we now celebrate, since it is through His sorrows and sacrifice alone that we can obtain eternal life. The Saviour was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" not only a man of sorrows, but the man of sorrows, in whom all kinds of sufferings met, and who suffered what no man can either suffer or even conceive of suffering. But as was the Master, such must be the disciples; and such have been the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. I speak more especially of those inspired men in whom the Lord more particularly manifested Himself; they were, I say, a succession of men of sorrows, from Abel down to St. Paul and St. John. This does not strike us sufficiently upon a superficial reading of the Scriptures; but if we penetrate a little into the study of the Word of God, we are more and more struck by it. The apostles, the prophets, appear throughout the Scriptures as men of sorrows, and of sorrows greater than we know or can clearly see; for the Scriptures rather give us glimpses than a full view of things. To make us understand what these men of God suffered, the Word of God must have detailed all the circumstances of their life.

As to the apostles, the life of one only is related at any length, and it is he whose ministry God defined by his sufferings, since He said when He called him, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." If we follow St. Paul through the course of his life, we shall find it, from beginning to end, a life of suffering, both mental and bodily. Hear what he says himself, in the last verses of the eleventh chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides these

things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" Examine every detail by itself. What a portrait! What activity both outward and inward! See the measure of his love in the measure of his sufferings.

As to the prophets, St. James says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." And if we study with attention the life of the prophets, especially of those whose history we know the least imperfectly, we shall find this declaration exactly realised; as, for example, in the case of Jeremiah, one of the prophets of whose life we have some knowledge. But of all the prophets, he of whom we know the most is David, whose history is given us more at length than that of any other. Have you ever reflected upon the various afflictions of the life of David? If you take his life as it is related in the first and second books of Samuel, or in the books of the Kings and Chronicles, you will know it but very imperfectly. You will see in David a man who, in the beginning of his life, was pursued by Saul. He had many enemies, but, after all, he triumphed over Saul, which brought upon him much honour. You then see this same man much cast down and afflicted in his own family, as the just consequences of his sins; but you also see him consoled and abundantly supported by God, who, even in his most terrible chastisements, remembered His promises to David, and His mercy towards him. It is a life in which we find many trials and much affliction; but all that does not give us a just idea of David's sorrows. We must read the Psalms to understand his afflictions. The Psalms reveal his secret thoughts, and in some measure they reveal the secret thoughts of all God's prophets. They are full of expressions of unspeakable anguish. David constantly complains of his sufferings, of his diseases, of his innumerable enemies. We cannot easily understand what he means by those enemies of whom he so constantly speaks; but they seem to reveal inward sufferings of which, with the history of David only before us, we should never have been aware. This is one of the peculiar features of the Psalms. Read the thirty-eighth, and weigh every verse of it.

"O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. They also that seek after my life lay snares for me; and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as

a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God. For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong; and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is. Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation." Innumerable enemies pursue him, the sense "of his sin overwhelms him," and then a complication of maladies. He is afflicted in his eyes, and he loses his sight; his loins are filled with a loathsome disease; his body is bowed down, so that he can scarcely walk; "his wounds stink and are corrupt." Such is David in this psalm. But if you read the sixth, if you read the sixty-ninth, and a number of psalms, you will find him in similar distress. He is, indeed, a man overwhelmed by suffering. We must not say, that as David was a type of Jesus Christ, those sufferings belong only to the Messiah. Undoubtedly David's sufferings were a type of those of Jesus Christ, but they could only be a type of the Messiah's sufferings, because they were intense sufferings; and it is precisely because David was a man of sorrow, that he was a type of the Man of Sorrows.

But, my dear friends, shall we stop here? After having seen that the apostles and the prophets were men of sorrow, shall we not go beyond this sad idea of suffering? They were not only men of sufferings, but they were men who overcame their sufferings and made them turn to the glory of God. Jesus Christ at the head of His followers triumphs over sufferings, and pursues His mission of love even in the midst of the most cruel anguish. In Gethsemane we hear Him exhorting His disciples, and maintaining all His presence of mind when He has to fulfil a message of love to them. It is the same upon the cross, where He does not miss an opportunity of giving to His disciples—to the crowd that followed—to John—to Mary—to all—exhortations concerning eternal life, even to the end of His dreadful agony. He is everywhere "the man of sorrow," triumphing over suffering, to accomplish in suffering and by suffering His mission. We see the same thing in His disciples and in the apostles. What use does St. Paul make of his sufferings? He makes them all turn to the glory of God. He is not overcome by sufferings so easily as we are. He triumphs over them by the love of Christ, and makes them all serve with wonderful fidelity to the advancement of the reign of God. And do you remark how David, of whom I have spoken more at length than of the others, triumphed over his afflictions to accomplish his work? The great object of the mission David received from God for all generations in the Church was the composition of the Psalms; and he composed them, or a considerable part of them, in the midst of the most cruel sufferings. Can you imagine yourself oppressed by physical, moral, and spiritual sufferings, called upon to compose a psalm? Can you imagine that at the very moment when your sufferings are such as are described in the thirty-eighth Psalm, you should burst forth in

hymns to the glory of God, and for the instruction of the Church! How David triumphs over himself, and how humiliating is this example for us, who in our weakness are often obliged to wait till the poignancy of suffering is past, to be able to reap benefit from it ourselves, and make it profitable to others! But David writes his psalms under suffering. He writes the thirty-eighth while suffering persecution, inward torments, and the bitterness of sin. I know it may be said that David wrote the thirty-eighth Psalm when free from pain, and calmly reviewing the remembrance of sufferings gone by, as the poet describes in imagination sufferings which he has never known; but this supposition is as repugnant to you as to me. It is in the furnace—in the furnace of affliction—that he writes these lines, which are to serve as an encouragement to the Church at all times. O power of the love of Christ! O renunciation of self-will! O grace in the true servant of God! O strength of the apostle and of the prophet! or rather, strength of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in them,—for never could men of themselves be capable of such strength of will, and such triumph over the flesh!

My dear friends, I leave it to each of you to make the application. It may be summed up in two questions. Are we men of sorrow, and what share have we in the afflictions of Christ? When we have our part in the afflictions of Christ, do we know how to triumph over them by the constraining power of love, and turn them to the good of our neighbour and our brother, at the same time that they conduce still more to sanctify and strengthen us, and to prepare for us a treasure of excellent glory?