

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

The 14 rules for suffering well

By Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

1- Not to deliberately cause crosses, by one's own fault

Do not deliberately contrive to bring crosses upon yourself. We must not do something wrong in order to bring about something good; nor must we, without a special inspiration of God, do things badly so as to draw down ridicule upon ourselves. Rather we ought to imitate our Lord, of whom it was said, “He did all things well,” not indeed out of self-esteem or vanity, but to please

God and win over our fellow- men. And if you fulfil your duties as well as you can, you will find no lack of opposition, criticism and ridicule, which will be sent by divine providence without your choosing or wanting it.

2- Be aware of one's neighbour's good

If you happen to do something which is neither good nor bad in itself, and your neighbour takes scandal at it - although

without reason - refrain from doing it, out of charity to him, so as to avoid the scandal of the weak. Such an heroic act of charity will be of greater worth in God's sight than the action you were doing or intending to do. However, if what you are doing is necessary or beneficial to your neighbour, and some hypocritical or evil-minded person takes scandal without reason, refer the matter to some prudent adviser to find out whether it is really necessary or advantageous to others. If he judges it is, then carry on without worrying about what people say, so long as they do not stop you. And you can say to them what our Lord said to some of his disciples when they told him that the scribes and Pharisees

were scandalised at what he said and did: "Leave them alone. They are blind men leading the blind."

3- Admire the sublime virtue of the saints without pretending to attain to it

Although certain great and holy men have sought and asked for crosses, and even by their peculiar behaviour have brought sufferings, scorn and humiliations upon themselves, let us be content with admiring and praising the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit in their souls. Let us humble ourselves at the sight of such sublime virtue without attempting to reach such heights

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

Born poor. Studied in Paris, France, and ordained in 1700. Under Mary's inspiration, he founded the Daughters of Divine Wisdom, a religious institute of women devoted to the care of the desititute, and a brother organization, the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. During this work, he began his apostolate of preaching the Rosary and authentic Marian devotion. He preached Mary everywhere and to everyone. A member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, Saint Louis was one of the greatest apostles of the Rosary in his day, and by means his miraculously



inspiring book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, he is still so today; the most common manner of reciting the Rosary is the method that originated with Saint Louis's preaching. In 1715, he founded the missionaries known as the Company of Mary or Montfort Missionaries.

His greatest contribution to the Church and world is Total Consecration to the Blessed Virgin. He propagated this in his day by preaching and after his own death by his other famous book *True Devotion to Mary*.

ourselves. Compared with those swift eagles and strong lions, we are timid and faint-hearted sheep.

4- Ask God for the wisdom of the cross

You may, and should, pray for the wisdom of the cross, that knowledge of the truth which we experience within ourselves and which by the light of faith deepens our knowledge of the most hidden mysteries, including that of the cross. But this is obtained only by much labour, great humiliations and fervent prayer. If you stand in need of this strengthening spirit which enables us to carry the heaviest crosses courageously; of this gracious and consoling spirit, which enables us, in the higher part of the soul, to take delight in things that are bitter and repulsive; of this sound and upright spirit which seeks God alone; of this science of the cross which embraces all things; in short, of this inexhaustible treasure by which those who make good use of it win God's friendship - if you stand in need of such, pray for wisdom, ask for it continually and fervently without wavering or fear of not obtaining it, and it will be yours. Then you will clearly understand from your own experience how it is possible to desire, seek and find joy in the cross.

5- Humble oneself for one's faults, without worrying

If you make a blunder which brings a cross upon you, whether it be inadvertently

or even through your own fault, bow down under the mighty hand of God without delay, and as far as possible do not worry over it. You might say within yourself, "Lord, here is a sample of my handiwork." If there is anything wrong in what you have done, accept the humiliation as a punishment for it; if it was not sinful, accept it as a means of humbling your pride. Frequently, even very frequently, God allows his greatest servants, those far advanced in holiness, to fall into the most humiliating faults so as to humble them in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. He thus keeps them from thoughts of pride in which they might indulge because of the graces they have received, or the good they are doing, so that "no-one can boast in God's presence."

6- God humbles us to purify us

You must realise that through the sin of Adam and through the sins we ourselves have committed, everything in us has become debased, not only our bodily senses, but also the powers of our soul. And so the moment our corrupt minds reflect with self-complacency on any of God's gifts within us, that gift, that action, that grace becomes tarnished and spoiled, and God no longer looks on it with favour. If the thoughts and reflections of the mind can so spoil man's best actions and God's greatest gifts, how much worse will be the evil effects of man's self-will, which are even more corrupt than those of the mind?

So we need not be surprised that God is

pleased to hide his friends in the shelter of his presence, that they may not be defiled by the scrutiny of men or by their own self-awareness. And to keep them hidden, what does this jealous God not permit and even bring about! How often he humiliates them! How many faults he allows them to fall into! By what temptations he permits them to be attacked, as St. Paul was! In what uncertainty, darkness and perplexity he leaves them! Oh, how wonderful is God in his saints, and in the means he adopts to lead them to humility and holiness!

7- Avoid the trap of pride in one's crosses

Do not be like those proud and self-conceited church-goers, imagining that your crosses are heavy, that they are proofs of your fidelity and marks of God's exceptional love for you. This temptation, arising from spiritual pride, is most deceptive, subtle and full of poison. You must believe (1) that your pride and sensitiveness make you magnify splinters into planks, scratches into wounds, molehills into mountains, a passing word meaning nothing into an outrageous insult or a cruel slight; (2) that the crosses God sends you are loving punishments for your sins rather than marks of God's special favour; (3) that whatever cross or humiliation he sends you is exceedingly light in comparison with the number and the greatness of your offences, for you should consider your sins in the light of God's holiness, who yourself; in the

light of a God suffering death while overwhelmed with sorrow at the sight of your sins; in the light of an everlasting hell which you have deserved time and again; (4) that the patience with which you bear your sufferings is tinged more than you think with natural and human motives. Witness those little ways of looking after yourself, that unobtrusive seeking for sympathy, those confidences you make in such a natural way to your friends, and perhaps to your spiritual director, those specious excuses you are so ready with, those complaints, or rather criticisms of those who have done you an injury, expressed in such pleasant words and charitable manner, that keen satisfaction you feel on considering your troubles, that self-complacency of Lucifer which makes you imagine you are somebody, and so on. I should never finish if I were to describe here all the twists and turns of human nature, even in suffering.

8- Profit by little sufferings rather than great ones

Take advantage of little sufferings, even more than of great ones. God considers not so much what we suffer as how we suffer. To suffer a great deal, but badly, is to suffer like the damned; to suffer much, even bravely, but for an evil cause, is to suffer as a disciple of the devil; to suffer little or much for God's sake is to suffer like a saint.

If it is true to say that we may have a preference for certain crosses, let it be particularly for small, obscure ones

when they come to us at the same time as great and spectacular ones. To seek and ask for great and dazzling crosses, and even to choose and welcome them, may be the result of our natural pride; but to choose small and insignificant ones and bear them cheerfully can only come from a special grace and a great fidelity to God. So do what a shopkeeper does in regard to his business: turn everything to profit. Do not allow the tiniest piece of the true Cross to be lost, even though it be only an insect-sting or a pin-prick, a little eccentricity of your neighbour or some unintentional slight, the loss of some money, some little anxiety, a little bodily weariness, or a slight pain in your limbs. Turn everything to profit, as the grocer does in his shop, and you will soon become rich before God, just as the grocer becomes rich in money by adding penny to penny in his till. At the least annoyance say, "Thank you, Lord. Your will be done." Then store up in God's memory-bank, so to speak, the profitable cross you have just gained, and think no more about except to repeat your thanks.

**9- Love crosses,
not with an emotional love, but with
rational and supernatural love**

When we are told to love the cross, that does not refer to an emotional love, impossible to our human nature. There are three kinds of love: emotional love, rational love, and the supernatural love of faith. In other words, the love that resides in the lower part of man, in his

body; the love in the higher part, his reason; and the love in the highest part of man, in the summit of the soul, that is, the intelligence enlightened by faith.

God does not ask you to love the cross with the will of the flesh. Since the flesh is subject to sin and corruption, all that proceeds from it is perverted and, of itself, cannot be submissive to the will of God and his crucifying law. It was this human will our Lord referred to in the Garden of Olives when he cried out, "Father, let your will be done, not mine."

There is another love of the cross which I have called rational love and which is in the higher part of man, the mind. This love is entirely spiritual; it springs from the knowledge of how happy we can be in suffering for God, and so it can be experienced by the soul, to which it gives interior joy and strength. But although this rational and perceptible joy is good, in fact, excellent, it is not always necessary in order to suffer joyfully for God's sake.

And so there is a third kind of love, which is called by the masters of the spiritual life the love of the summit of the soul, and which is known to philosophers as the love of the intellect. In this, without any feeling of joy in the senses or pleasure in the mind, we love the cross we are carrying, by the light of pure faith, and take delight in it, even though the lower part of our nature may be in a state of conflict and disturbance, groaning and complaining, weeping and longing for relief. In this case, we can say with our Lord, "Father, let your will be done, not mine;" or with our Lady,

“I am the slave of the Lord: let what you have said be done to me.”

It is with one of these two higher loves that we should love and accept the cross.

10- Suffer all sorts of crosses, without exception and without choice

My dear Friends of the Cross, make the resolution to suffer any kind of cross without excluding or choosing any: any poverty, injustice, loss, illness, humiliation, contradiction, slander, spiritual dryness, desolation, interior and exterior trials, saying always, “My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.” Be prepared, then, to be forsaken by men and angels, and seemingly by God himself; to be persecuted, envied, betrayed, slandered, discredited and abandoned by everyone; to suffer hunger, thirst, poverty, nakedness, exile, imprisonment, the gallows, and all kinds of torture, even though you have done nothing to deserve it.

You should firmly believe that this is the highest point of heavenly glory and of genuine happiness for the true and perfect Friend of the Cross.

11- Four considerations for suffering well

To help you to suffer in the right spirit, acquire the good habit of reflecting on these four points:

[a. The eye of God] Firstly, the eye of God, who, like a great king from the height of a tower, observes with

satisfaction his soldier in the midst of battle, and praises his courage. What is it that attracts God’s attention on earth? Is it kings and emperors on their thrones? He often regards them only with contempt. Is it great victories of armies, precious stones, or whatever is great in the eyes of men? No, “what is thought highly of by men is loathsome in the sight of God.” What, then, does he look upon with pleasure and satisfaction, and about which he inquires of the angels and even the devils? It is the one who is struggling with the world, the devil, and himself for the love of God, the one who carries his cross cheerfully. As the Lord said to Satan, “Did you not see on earth a great wonder, at which all heaven is filled with admiration? Have you seen my servant Job, who is suffering for my sake?”

[b. The hand of God] Secondly, consider the hand of God. All natural evils which befall us, from the smallest to the greatest, come from the hand of God. The same hand that killed an army of a hundred thousand men on the spot also causes a leaf to fall from the tree and a hair from your head; the hand which pressed so heavily on Job gently touches you with a light tribulation. It is the same hand which makes both day and night, sunshine and darkness, good and evil. He has permitted the sinful actions which hurt you; he is not the cause of their malice, but he permits the actions.

On the one hand, God in his infinite power and wisdom bears you up, while with the other he afflicts you. With one hand he deals out death, while with the other he dispenses life. He humbles you

to the dust and raises you up, and with both arms he reaches from one end of your life to the other with kindness and power; with kindness, by not allowing you to be tempted and afflicted beyond your strength; with power, by supporting you with his grace in proportion to the violence and duration of the temptation or affliction; with power again, by coming himself, as he tells us through his holy Church, “to support you on the edge of the precipice, to guide you on the uncertain road, to shade you in the scorching heat, to protect you in the drenching rain and biting cold, to carry you in your weariness, to aid you in your difficulties, to steady you on slippery paths, to be your refuge in the midst of storms” (Prayer for a Journey).

[c. The wounds and sufferings of Christ crucified] Thirdly, reflect on the wounds and sufferings of Christ crucified. He himself has told us, “All you who pass by the way” of thorns and the cross, “look and see.” Look with the eyes of your body, and see through the eyes of your contemplation, whether your poverty, destitution, disgrace, sorrow, desolation are like mine; look upon me who am innocent, and lament, you who are guilty!

The Holy Spirit tells us, through the Apostles, to contemplate the crucified Christ. He bids us arm ourselves with this thought, for it is the most powerful and formidable weapon against our enemies. When you are assailed by poverty, disrepute, sorrow, temptation, and other crosses, arm yourselves with the shield, breastplate, helmet and two-

edged sword, which is the remembrance of Christ crucified. It is there you will find the solution of every problem and the means to conquer all your enemies.

[d. Heaven above; hell below] Fourthly, look upwards and see the beautiful crown that awaits you in heaven if you carry your cross well. It was this reward which sustained the patriarchs and prophets in their faith and persecutions; which inspired the apostles and martyrs in their labours and torments. The patriarchs could say with Moses, “We would rather be afflicted with the people of God, and be happy with him forever, than enjoy for a time the pleasures of sin.” And the prophets could say with David, “We suffer persecution for the reward.” The apostles and martyrs could say with St. Paul, “We are as men sentenced to death, put on show in front of the whole universe, angels as well as men, by our suffering, and as the offal of the world, the scum of the earth, for the sake of a weight of eternal glory, which this small and temporary suffering will produce in us.”

12- Never complain against creatures

Never willingly complain against any person or thing that God may use to afflict you. There are three kinds of complaints we may make in times of distress. The first is natural and spontaneous, as when the body groans and complains, weeps and laments. There is no fault in this, provided, as I have said, that the heart is resigned to the will of God. The second kind of

complaint is that of the mind, as when we make known our ills to someone who can give us some relief, such as a doctor or a superior. There may be some imperfection in this if we are too eager to tell our troubles, but there is no sin in it. The third kind is sinful: that is when we criticise our neighbour either to get rid of an evil which afflicts us or to take revenge on him; or when we willfully complain of what we suffer with impatience and murmuring.

13- Accept the cross only with gratitude

Whenever you receive any cross, always welcome it with humility and gratitude. And when God favours you with a cross of some importance, show your gratitude in a special way, and get others to thank him for you. Follow the example of the poor woman who lost all that she had in an unjust law-suit and immediately offered her few remaining coins to have a Mass said in thanksgiving for her good fortune.

14- Take up some voluntary crosses

If you want to make yourself worthy of the best kind of crosses, that is, those which come to you without your choosing, then under the guidance of a prudent director, take up some of your own accord.

For example, suppose you have a piece of furniture you are fond of, but which

is of no use to you. You could give it away to someone who needs it, saying to yourself, "Why should I have things I don't need when Jesus is so poor?"

Or if you have a distaste for a certain kind of food, an aversion for the practice of some particular virtue, or a dislike for some offensive odour, you could take the food, practice the virtue, accept the odour, and thus conquer yourself.

Or again, your fondness for a certain person or thing may be immoderate. Why not see less of that person, or keep away from those things that attract you?

If you have a natural inclination never to miss what is going on, to be always doing things, to be in the limelight, to frequent popular places, then guard your eyes, watch your tongue, and stay where you are.

Have you a natural aversion for certain persons or things? Then overcome it by not avoiding them.

If you are truly Friends of the Cross, then, without your knowing it, love, which is ever ingenious, will discover thousands of little crosses to enrich you. And you will not need to have any fear of vainglory, which so often spoils the patience which people exhibit under spectacular crosses. And because you have been faithful in little things, the Lord will place you in charge of greater, according to his promise. That is to say, in charge of the greater graces he will bestow on you, of the greater crosses he will send you, of the greater glory he will prepare for you.