

Consolation and Suffering

“Grant that by the gift of Thy Spirit right judgment may be ours and that we may ever find joy in his comfort” (Feast of Pentecost).

The Divine Efficacy of Pain

- Spiritual consolations are not constant in the supernatural life; ordinarily, they are **intermittent**. There are seasons of joy and seasons of suffering, times of consolation and times of desolation.
- The reason for these variations is not that God is limited or restricted in his gifts, but that we need the sterner experiences. If consolations expand the heart, if they fortify and give courage, desolations, on the other hand, produce precious fruits, fruits that are perhaps even richer and more abundant.
- God has put **a divine efficacy into pain**. Desolations purify us, elevate us, illuminate us. They prepare our souls for union with God. We see, therefore, that his wisdom and goodness intertwine consolations and desolations in our life. Now he bathes us in solace; now he leaves us un comforted. Both states are tokens of his divine munificence, proofs of his love, for both are most advantageous to our spiritual progress.

Consolations and Desolations are Necessary

- We cannot come to a conclusion about the state of our soul from its suffering or its rejoicing.
- The spiritual novice will say: “When I feel fervor and consolation, everything is very well with me; when I do not, things are going wrong.” This reasoning is incorrect.
- Consolations and desolations cannot be taken as a measure of spiritual condition. Both are necessary to health and progress. Consolation indicates, certainly, that the soul has taken a step in the spiritual life, but desolation may be a sign that it is even nearer to the summit.

Step 1: Prayer

- We may desire the consolations of God, we may look for them with moderation and we may prepare ourselves to receive them.
- The first means for obtaining them, as for obtaining any other grace, is **prayer**. As we have been told so often, prayer is the key that opens divine treasures, both in the natural and in the supernatural order. God has promised to listen to our prayers. Jesus Christ told us this time after time. On the night of the great mysteries, the eve of his passion, he said: “If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you” (Jn 16:23).

Step 2: Remove Obstacles

- The second step is to **take away the obstacles** opposed to the reception of heavenly consolations.
- Our daily experience tells us that certain actions or conditions disturb us and others hinder us. For example, infirmities of body hinder the appreciation of many things.
- The same thing is true in the spiritual order. **Some circumstances prevent us from enjoying the consolations of God.** When we are **too attached to the things of earth**, when **vices**, especially of the gross, base kind, find their way into our heart, we cannot perceive spiritual things.

Step 3: Work

- Each step of that orderly process is marked by the appearance of some fruit of the Spirit. Whenever part of our soul is perfected, it receives an effusion of heavenly consolations. Therefore, if we desire to obtain the fruits of the Spirit, the third step is to work, to try to purify our souls little by little, to advance little by little on the road to perfection.